

Community & Political Actions for Australians

Working to Slow Climate Breakdown

A 2026 guide to high-impact advocacy beyond personal carbon footprint

Introduction

While personal choices matter — reducing consumption, flying less, shifting towards plant-based diets — researchers increasingly argue that systemic and political change is where the greatest leverage lies in slowing climate breakdown. This is especially true in Australia, which per capita is among the world's highest greenhouse gas emitters and one of the world's largest fossil fuel exporters. The political and community landscape in Australia offers specific, high-leverage pathways that are distinct from those in other countries, and this guide focuses on those.

A 2024 Nature Climate Change study surveying nearly 130,000 people across 125 countries found that 89% of the global population demands intensified political action on climate change, but that most people underestimate how willing their fellow citizens already are to act — a state of "pluralistic ignorance." Correcting this misperception through community and political action is one of the most important contributions Australians can make.

Note on research: most rigorous studies on the effectiveness of climate activism have been conducted in Europe and North America. Where specific Australian evidence exists, it is highlighted; where it does not, international findings are noted as the best available guide, with context about how they may apply here.

1. Voting and Electoral Engagement

Why the Australian electoral system offers unique leverage

Australia's compulsory preferential voting system gives every vote unusual weight. Preferences flow until a candidate is elected, meaning a first-preference vote for the Greens or a climate-focused independent is not "wasted" — it can flow to Labor or another preferred major-party candidate. In the Senate, proportional representation means minor parties and independents regularly hold the balance of power.

The 2022 federal election demonstrated this leverage in a striking way. The rise of the "teal independents" — community-backed candidates running on climate action and political integrity — saw six sitting Liberal MPs defeated in seats the party had held for decades. Research by the Climate Council found that at the 2025 federal election, pro-climate independents increased their combined primary vote by 3.8% across contested seats, and the Greens gained Senate seats to hold 12, retaining the balance of power in the upper house.

Analysis in *PLOS One* found that a large majority of Australians think it is important to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, though this view is sharply divided along party lines. This means that mobilising existing climate-concerned voters — not converting sceptics — is often the most productive electoral strategy.

Actions to take

- Use preferential voting strategically: place your first preference with the candidate or party you most want to win, and use subsequent preferences to express your climate priorities. In the Senate, vote below the line for maximum control over preferences, or carefully select above-the-line options.
- Support community independent campaigns in your electorate. Even in "safe" seats, strong independent challenges shift party behaviour and signal changing voter priorities.
- Donate to or volunteer with Climate 200, which raises funds for pro-climate independent candidates and supported 35 candidates in 2025. Their model of community-backed independents has demonstrated real electoral impact.
- In state elections, apply the same logic: state governments control planning laws, land use, public transport, and energy policy — areas with enormous emissions consequences.
- Check the Climate Council's election scorecards (released before each federal and state election) to compare party and candidate records on climate.

Key organisation: Climate 200

Climate 200 (climate200.com.au) is a crowdfunded campaign that supports independent candidates committed to stronger climate action and political integrity. It helped unseat multiple Liberal MPs in 2022 and supported candidates across 35 seats in 2025. It is funded by small donations from thousands of Australians, not corporate donors.

2. Talking About Climate Change

The evidence

Atmospheric scientist Dr Katharine Hayhoe argues that talking about climate change is "the most important thing you can do." Social science research consistently shows that friends, family, and neighbours are the most trusted and effective messengers on climate — ranked above scientists and politicians. A 2024 Yale Climate Communication study confirmed that perceiving social norms as supportive of climate action increases people's own willingness to act.

In Australia, this mechanism is especially relevant. Research published in *PLOS One* found that climate concern is tightly clustered by party identity, making peer conversations across social divides potentially high value. The 2022 teal independent victories were partly attributed to "Kitchen Table Conversations" — structured community discussions that reached massive scale, with some campaigns knocking on 55,000 doors in a single electorate.

Climate for Change: an Australian model

Climate for Change (climateforchange.org.au) is Australia's first environmental organisation focused entirely on facilitating climate conversations. Its flagship "Climate Conversations" program uses a home-hosted conversation model — similar to a Tupperware party — to bring people together to discuss climate change in trusted, relaxed settings. Their impact report shows 86% of attendees feel more empowered to take climate action afterwards; notably, 56% had previously had no involvement with any environmental organisation. The program has engaged more than 11,500 people.

Climate for Change also runs MP Engagement Groups — trained local groups who meet regularly with their federal and state MPs to advocate for climate policy. This combines the power of community conversation with direct political lobbying.

Actions to take

- Host or attend a Climate for Change "Climate Conversation" with friends, family, or colleagues. Training and facilitation guides are freely available on their website.
- Join a Climate for Change MP Engagement Group in your area, or start one if none exists.
- Connect climate to locally relevant impacts — in Queensland, the Great Barrier Reef; in Victoria and NSW, bushfire risk; in Western Australia, coral bleaching and extreme heat. Local relevance dramatically increases engagement.
- Share your own actions publicly — the number one predictor of solar panel adoption is having a neighbour who already has them. Visible action normalises it.

3. Contacting and Lobbying Elected Representatives

Why direct contact matters

In Australia, as in other democracies, constituent contact with MPs does influence political behaviour. A 2021 field experiment published in *Climatic Change* found that citizen lobbying changes the communications behaviour of elected officials on climate, even when direct policy votes are harder to trace. In Australia's parliamentary system, the primary levers are federal and state MPs and senators, many of whom are genuinely persuadable — particularly those in marginal seats or on the crossbench.

The most effective contacts are personal and specific: a letter or email from a constituent explaining how climate change affects their community, their family, or their livelihood carries more weight than a form letter or petition signature. Phone calls to electorate offices are read as particularly strong signals.

Actions to take

- Write a personal letter or email to your federal and state MPs. Find their contact details at aph.gov.au (federal) or your state parliament website. Focus on specific local impacts and ask for specific policy positions.
- Attend your MP's electorate clinic or community forums. These events are often sparsely attended; your presence and question carry disproportionate weight.
- If in a marginal seat or a teal-contested electorate, request a meeting with your MP's office — groups of five or more constituents are often granted face-to-face meetings.
- Use the Australian Conservation Foundation's (ACF) online tools to contact MPs during key legislative moments. ACF runs coordinated advocacy campaigns with templates you can personalise.
- Engage your local council on climate emergency declarations, council electrification commitments, and local planning decisions that affect emissions (such as urban density, cycling infrastructure, and tree canopy).

Key organisations supporting advocacy

- Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF, acf.org.au) — Australia's largest national environmental advocacy organisation (founded 1965). ACF was instrumental in the Business Council of Australia adopting a net-zero-by-2050 position and runs regular constituent-contact campaigns during critical policy moments.
 - Climate Action Network Australia (CANA, cana.net.au) — the peak body for Australian climate NGOs, with over 160 member organisations. A useful hub for finding local advocacy groups and campaigns.
 - Climate for Change (climateforchange.org.au) — runs structured MP Engagement Groups that provide training and community for sustained political advocacy.
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4. Demonstrations, Rallies, and Organised Protests

Evidence of effectiveness

A 2025 Yale University review of 50 rigorous studies on climate activism found strong evidence that protests raise public awareness and media attention, with little evidence of backlash — even disruptive protests rarely reduced overall public support for climate policies. In Germany, areas where Fridays for Future held protests showed a measurably higher vote share for the Greens, and a study of 25 German cities found all of them changed policymaking processes in response to the movement.

The Australian context has its own evidence. The School Strike for Climate mobilisations in 2019 — which brought hundreds of thousands of Australians into the streets, including the largest student strike in Australian history — were widely credited with making climate a central issue in that year's federal election campaign and shifting the political centre of gravity.

Disruptive tactics generate disproportionate media coverage, though their direct policy impact is less consistent. When Extinction Rebellion Netherlands blockaded Amsterdam's A12 motorway, the Dutch Parliament moved quickly to phase out fossil fuel subsidies. In Australia, the Just Stop Oil model of extreme disruption has been less prominent; XR and similar groups have tended toward civil disobedience at coal and gas infrastructure sites.

Key movements in Australia

- School Strike 4 Climate Australia (schoolstrike4climate.com) — continues to organise student-led climate strikes. Supporting and attending these events amplifies their political signal.
 - 350 Australia (350.org/australia) — organises mass public actions against fossil fuel expansion. Their network connects local groups across the country.
 - Extinction Rebellion Australia (ausrebellion.earth) — civil disobedience-focused movement that has targeted coal and gas infrastructure.
 - Frontline Action on Coal (FACE) — focuses on direct action at coal mines and power stations.
 - GetUp! (getup.org.au) — broad progressive campaigning organisation that frequently runs climate-focused actions, rallies, and electoral campaigns.
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5. Superannuation and Fossil Fuel Divestment

Australia's unique superannuation lever

Superannuation is one of the most powerful climate levers available to ordinary Australians that has no real equivalent in most other countries. Australia's compulsory superannuation system means that most working Australians have significant retirement savings — around \$4 trillion in total — invested through funds that often hold shares in fossil fuel companies. This gives Australians direct financial leverage over the fossil fuel industry.

Market Forces (marketforces.org.au), an Australian organisation focused on the intersection of money and fossil fuels, analyses and rates superannuation funds on their fossil fuel exposure and climate commitments. Their December 2024 analysis found that most of Australia's top 30 super funds failed to vote for greater climate action at shareholder meetings that year. A December 2025 report identified a "Fossil Fuel Expansion Index" of 200 global companies with the biggest coal, oil and gas expansion plans — showing how Australian retirement savings are still funding expansion.

Actions to take

- Check your super fund's climate rating using Market Forces' tool at marketforces.org.au/super. Funds range from excellent to poor on fossil fuel exposure.
- Contact your super fund directly to request: (1) full divestment from fossil fuel companies; (2) active engagement and voting against fossil fuel expansion at AGMs. Many funds have member communication channels specifically for this.

- Consider switching to a fossil-fuel-free or low-emissions super option. Most major funds now offer these, and Market Forces provides comparisons.
- At shareholder AGMs (many super funds allow member participation), vote for climate-related resolutions and against directors who support fossil fuel expansion.
- Engage your employer's default super fund — employers often have influence over which fund they nominate as default.

Banking and insurance

The same logic applies to banking and insurance. Market Forces also rates Australian banks on their fossil fuel lending. Switching to a bank that does not lend to new coal and gas projects (such as Bank Australia or Teachers Mutual Bank) removes financial support for fossil fuel expansion. Several Australian insurers have also publicly committed to not underwriting new coal projects.

6. Donating to Climate Organisations

Giving effectively in Australia

Climate philanthropy has been growing rapidly, but remains tiny relative to fossil fuel subsidies — estimated at \$1.3 trillion globally per year. In Australia, the federal government still subsidises fossil fuels, and new coal and gas projects continue to receive regulatory approval. Strategic donations to organisations working on the policy and advocacy levers most likely to change this can be highly cost-effective.

Giving Green, an evidence-based climate-giving guide run by climate scientists and economists, conducted a specific assessment of Australian climate organisations in 2024. Their top Australian recommendation was Beyond Zero Emissions, which was nominated as an outstanding Australian climate NGO more often than any other organisation in their expert survey.

Top Australian organisations recommended by effectiveness researchers

- Beyond Zero Emissions (bze.org.au) — Giving Green's top-rated Australian climate NGO. BZE produces detailed, costed plans for decarbonising Australian industry, including green steel and green hydrogen, and advocates for Australia's potential as a global exporter of clean energy. Giving Green concluded it has significant room for more funding and could deliver substantial returns on additional investment.
- Australian Conservation Foundation (acf.org.au) — Australia's peak environmental advocacy organisation, with a track record of shifting corporate and government positions on climate. ACF played a key role in the Business Council of Australia adopting a net-zero policy, and led coordinated campaigns that pressured Westpac to commit to divesting from thermal coal by 2030.
- Climate Council (climatecouncil.org.au) — Australia's leading independent climate communications and policy organisation. Produces authoritative public education, election scorecards, and policy advocacy. Funded entirely by the Australian public.

- Climate for Change (climateforchange.org.au) — runs the highly effective Climate Conversations program and MP Engagement Groups. A particularly good option for donors who want to build lasting community engagement and political advocacy capacity.
- Market Forces (marketforces.org.au) — focuses on removing financial flows to fossil fuels through bank, super fund, and corporate campaigning. A uniquely Australian focus on financial leverage.
- Parents for Climate Australia (parentsforclimate.org.au) — mobilises parents and grandparents as climate advocates, a politically influential and often less-represented demographic in the climate movement.
- Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC, arrcc.org.au) — engages faith communities across Australia in climate advocacy, an important and sometimes underestimated constituency.
- Solutions for Climate Australia (solutionsforclimate.org.au) — engages in direct political advocacy to all federal political parties, seeking concrete commitments and policy action.

International organisations also relevant to Australian giving

For Australians who want to maximise global impact, giving platforms such as Giving What We Can (givingwhatwecan.org) and the Giving Green Fund direct donations to internationally assessed, high-leverage organisations including the Clean Air Task Force and Carbon180. These may offer higher cost-effectiveness for global emissions reduction, though they do not directly address Australian political dynamics.

7. Political Donations in the Australian Context

Campaign finance and Australia

Australia's political donation rules differ significantly from those in the United States. There are limits on anonymous donations and disclosure requirements, though these vary by state and have been subject to ongoing reform debates. Unlike the US, where billionaire-backed super PACs dominate, Australian political fundraising is more decentralised — meaning grassroots donations and community campaigning carry relatively more weight.

The teal independent movement demonstrated this powerfully. Climate 200 raised funds from thousands of small donors — average donations under \$500 — to fund competitive campaigns in seats that had never been seriously contested. This model shows that aggregated small donations to community-backed candidates can be genuinely transformative in the Australian electoral context.

Actions to take

- Donate to Climate 200 (climate200.com.au) to support community independent candidates in future elections.
 - Donate directly to pro-climate independent candidates or Greens candidates in your electorate or in target seats.
 - Support organisations campaigning for stronger donation disclosure and campaign finance reform — opacity in political funding often benefits fossil fuel industry incumbents.
 - Be aware of the political donations by your employer, superannuation fund, and industry associations, and raise these if they conflict with climate action.
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8. Community Organising and Local Action

Building collective power at the local level

Research on political enablers of ambitious climate policy identifies local, decentralised organising as a key pathway through which successful policies scale up. This is especially relevant in Australia's highly urbanised but geographically dispersed society, where community organising looks different in Brisbane, regional Queensland, Melbourne's inner suburbs, and rural Western Australia.

The 2022 teal independent successes were built on years of prior community organising — Voices groups that started as informal kitchen-table gatherings and grew into serious electoral forces. The Commons Library, an Australian resource hub for progressive organising, documented in 2025 that community conversation programs played a crucial role in the 2022 results, with the most successful campaigns combining door-knocking, community forums, and digital outreach.

Australia-specific opportunities

- Join or form a local Voices group. The Voices movement (originating with Voices of Indi in 2013) organises community members around local political engagement, transcending party lines. Many operate across Australian electorates; find or start one at voicesof.org.au or similar.
- Engage your local council on climate emergency declarations. More than 100 Australian councils have declared a climate emergency. Council decisions on planning, local transport, building standards, and land use have real emissions consequences.
- Support community energy projects. Australia has a growing number of community-owned solar, wind, and battery storage projects. The Community Power Agency (communitypower.com.au) connects Australians with local renewable energy initiatives.
- Engage your union if you are a member. Unions have historically been ambivalent on climate due to concerns about fossil fuel industry jobs, but the "just transition" conversation is shifting. Supporting union engagement on climate and clean energy

transition is valuable.

- Engage your professional or industry association — particularly if you work in finance, health, architecture, engineering, or agriculture, where professional bodies have begun to take strong climate positions.
- Support Indigenous-led climate organisations. Indigenous communities in Australia are disproportionately affected by climate change and are at the forefront of land management and conservation. Organisations such as the First Nations Clean Energy Network advocate for Indigenous rights in the energy transition.

9. Australia's Role in Global Emissions

Fossil fuel exports: a uniquely Australian issue

Australia is one of the world's largest exporters of coal and liquefied natural gas. When the full lifecycle emissions of Australian fossil fuel exports are counted — the coal burned in Japan, South Korea, China, and India; the gas burned across Asia — Australia's contribution to global emissions is far larger than its domestic figures suggest. Climate Action Tracker rates Australia's overall climate action as "Insufficient," noting that while domestic renewable energy progress is real, support for fossil fuel exports remains unwavering.

This means that Australian political action to reduce fossil fuel approvals and exports has outsized global significance. Campaigns targeting new coal mine approvals, gas field expansions, and export terminal licences — areas where Australian governments continue to approve new projects — are particularly high leverage.

Actions relevant to export emissions

- Support organisations campaigning against new coal and gas approvals: the Australian Conservation Foundation, Environmental Defenders Office, and Lock the Gate Alliance all run campaigns in this space.
- Support Australia's bid to host COP31 in 2026 only if accompanied by a genuine strengthening of Australia's emissions targets — advocate for a meaningful 2035 target (the Climate Change Authority has recommended 62–70% below 2005 levels).
- Engage with trade policy: Australia's trading relationships with Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asian nations include climate components. Supporting diplomatic pressure for fossil fuel phase-out in trade agreements is an emerging lever.

Summary: Actions Ranked by Evidence of Effectiveness (Australian Context)

The following is a rough ordering based on available research and Australian context, acknowledging that scale, persistence, and local circumstances all affect outcomes:

- Voting and electoral engagement using preferential voting strategically — Australia's electoral system amplifies the impact of climate-conscious votes, as demonstrated by the teal independent victories of 2022 and 2025.
- Talking about climate change in trusted networks — the most accessible high-leverage action; Climate for Change provides a structured Australian pathway.
- Superannuation engagement — a uniquely powerful Australian lever; switching funds and pressuring existing funds costs little and moves significant capital.
- Direct lobbying and contact with MPs — evidence-backed; Australia's parliamentary system makes crossbench and marginal-seat MPs particularly responsive to constituent pressure.
- Donating to high-leverage Australian organisations — Beyond Zero Emissions (Giving Green's top Australian recommendation), ACF, Climate Council, and Climate for Change are well-evidenced choices.
- Donations and volunteering for community independent campaigns — Climate 200's model has demonstrated transformative results in Australian electoral politics.
- Mass protests and demonstrations — effective for agenda-setting and normalising climate concern; School Strike 4 Climate demonstrated real Australian impact in 2019.
- Community organising — builds the durable political will that makes all other actions possible.

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Document prepared April 2026. Information is current to the knowledge available at time of writing. Australian electoral and policy information reflects the situation following the May 2025 federal election.