

## ACF COMMUNITY TOOLKIT

A practical guide for determined citizens to take collective action against pollution and destruction and for a more beautiful world.

# How to change the story **on** **social media**



**AUSTRALIAN  
CONSERVATION  
FOUNDATION**

# Top tips!

## Say what we really value...page 9

- > Always **be mindful** of the values you're encouraging people to focus on when you're commenting
- > **Self-centred values** make people more selfish, anti-social and apathetic – avoid or critique them!
- > **Compassionate values** encourage people to think 'bigger than self' and get involved. So motivate people to act by focusing on care, equality and responsibility.

## Most people care...page 12

- > Remember, **most people care** – they are generous, socially minded and empathetic
- > Our job is not to convince uncaring people to start caring – it's to encourage people they can **make a difference** and show them how!
- > Encourage **compassionate values**, not selfish ones

## Talk about what matters...page 15

- > Use simple, plain language. Describe things for an **eight-year-old** to get to the heart of what matters
- > Describe **lived experiences** – the air we breathe, the water we drink
- > Be social – not boring! Have conversations and **talk like a real person**
- > Keep it **short and sweet**.

## Connect people to nature...page 18

- > Don't separate people from nature. Remember, we're all **connected to the web of life**, and when humans harm nature we're harming ourselves.
- > Help people **fall in love with nature** – big old trees, fluffy numbat babies and legless lizards are incredible!
- > Don't talk about 'the environment' or 'species' – use **evocative language**

## People do things...page 20

- > Climate change and land clearing aren't happening on their own. So be clear about **who's doing what and why**.
- > Talk about **clear villains** who we can work together to stop.
- > Emphasise **people power** and invite others to join in
- > Don't undermine democracy – critique the behaviour of individual politicians but we need **good governments** to step up and solve these issues!

## Have a dream...page 22

- > People have 99 problems and don't need any more – so **give them something to believe in**, something worth striving for
- > Don't just aim for a **less awful future** or a non-apocalyptic climate – we want to live in a place where everyone can have a good life
- > Talk about **beautiful cakes – outcomes!** – not just recipes, policies or paperwork.

# Why do we need to **change the** **story?**

“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful  
lot, nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”

– DR SEUSS



## STORIES MATTER

We navigate the world through stories. They spark our imaginations and help us understand the world and ourselves. Through story, we make sense of complex situations and imagine what is possible.

People have long shared stories to explain why things are the way they are. We're told a product in a jar will make us look younger. Mining is the backbone of Australia's prosperity. We can have endless growth on a finite planet if we work hard and strengthen the economy. People are not part of nature – humans can damage and exploit nature without real consequences.

Many of these contemporary myths are destructive and outdated. But they are like glue, holding together the status quo and making alternatives seem unimaginable. They are blinding societies to reality and limiting solutions. They're making us feel powerless and hopeless. At a price.

We can and must disrupt these old myths and share new stories to persuade a critical mass of people that fundamental change is not only possible, but urgently necessary.

*It's up to us to change these stories and shift the debate to value our living world and activate people to get involved.*

These new stories will not emerge from on high from governments or institutions. Instead they will grow from communities and grassroots movements, working together. That's people like us!

A compelling story can engage and grow a powerful community, reconnect people with our living world and move them to take action.

*Compelling stories have a good plot with heroes, villains and protagonists. They are simple and believable. They are 'action-worthy' – they have problems and solutions that really matter to people.*

We face some big challenges, but we live in exciting times, and the stories we tell ourselves and each other will play a big part in how the next few decades unfold.

So let's get on with it.





## MEME TEAM!

With social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, we can share stories, ideas and information wider than ever before. By clicking a button, a single message can reach millions of people in minutes.

Too often though, the things we see online are full of negativity, apathy and inaction. But by bringing together people from our amazing community, we can change this story.

The Change the Story Team is an online force for nature using the power of story to shift how people understand and interpret issues.

Rather than feed negativity and trolls, let's talk about action and change. Instead of feeling anxious as we scroll our newsfeeds, let's feel inspired and empowered. By reinforcing positivity and action, we can get people acting for our planet and for the issues that matter.

## LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

Learn the core principles, tools and techniques to change the story in ACF's *Narrative Handbook: How to tell compelling stories that move people to action*.

Download a copy of the handbook and 'words to embrace, words to replace' guide at [www.acf.org.au/narrative-handbook](http://www.acf.org.au/narrative-handbook)



People's Climate March. Photo: James Thomas.

## RESOURCES

### Share the love on social media

Download social media shareables at >> [www.acf.org.au/action\\_resources](http://www.acf.org.au/action_resources).

Make sure you tag us on Twitter [@AusConservation](https://twitter.com/AusConservation) and Facebook [Australian Conservation Foundation](https://www.facebook.com/AustralianConservationFoundation)

### Download posters and graphics

Check out the resources, posters and graphics at  
>> [www.acf.org.au/action\\_resources](http://www.acf.org.au/action_resources)

### Good places to find free, high resolution, creative commons photos:

Unsplash >> [unsplash.com/](http://unsplash.com/)

Pixabay >> [pixabay.com](http://pixabay.com)

Splitshire >> [www.splitshire.com](http://www.splitshire.com)

The Stocks >> [thestocks.im](http://thestocks.im)



## WORDS TO EMBRACE

our living world  
forests, wildlife, people and reefs  
the air we breathe, water we  
drink, the planet we call home  
Forests, moss, people, sugar  
gliders, creeks, magpies, coral  
reefs, sea ice, birdsong

plants, animals and wildlife

care / stand up, speak out and act

we are

pollution

cut pollution

damage to our climate  
big polluting companies are  
damaging our climate

polluting energy like coal and gas

clean energy from the sun and  
wind

laws to cut pollution and shift to  
clean energy  
laws to outlaw pollution

laws to protect the air we breathe,  
the water we drink and the places  
and wildlife we love

helping people who work in  
affected industries and their  
communities prepare for jobs for  
the future

not

not

not

not

not

not

not

not

not

not

not

not

## WORDS TO REPLACE

the environment

species

fight

we should / could / need to

emissions / carbon pollution  
/ greenhouse gases

tackle climate change / climate  
action

the climate is changing / global  
warming / climate change

fossil fuels / carbon-rich energy

renewables / alternative energy

climate policy, EIS, carbon tax,  
carbon price, CET, any acronym,  
anything that could have an  
acronym

environment laws

just transitions



# 1. Say what we really value

## How to **say what we really value**

- > Always **be mindful** of the values you're encouraging people to focus on when you're commenting
- > **Self-centred values** make people more selfish, anti-social and apathetic – avoid or critique them!
- > **Compassionate values** encourage people to think 'bigger than self' and get involved. So motivate people to act by focusing on care, equality and responsibility.

To solve the pollution and extinction crisis, we must shift what our society values as most important. Instead of focusing on getting richer no matter what, we must start caring most about each other and our living world.

## WHAT ARE VALUES?

Values shape our thoughts, actions and broadest attitudes, as well as social norms and institutions. They affect how we see the world and motivate us to behave in certain ways.

They influence our political persuasions, or career choices, how we live, what resources we use, our personal wellbeing.

Values also shape public concern. They guide how our community responds to environmental issues – and what we do about them. They motivate people to care and act about climate change, environmental destruction, persistent child poverty and rising inequality – or they drive people to strive for wealth and status instead.

## WHY DO VALUES MATTER?

Governments and businesses won't begin to really solve the big problems we face until there's a widespread demand for change — driven by compassionate values such as caring about our environment, concern for future generations, social justice and responsibility.

Our society must also focus less on making money and mindless consumption because they are destroying our planet. This means less emphasis on self-centred values like wealth, social status, prestige, authority, conformity, controlling people, ambition, influence, popularity and social recognition.



**Hot tip!** *If we try to get people to care about climate change (or social justice or extinction) by talking to their greed, or their ego, or even their personal security, research shows their engagement tends to be shallow and short-lived.*



**Australian Conservation Foundation**

11 April at 17:58 · 🌐

Polluting coal has no social license on our warming planet.

A good government would ramp up clean energy to safeguard our air, water and wildlife.

## HOW TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO VALUE WHAT REALLY MATTERS

### 1. Talk to our best selves

Research from Common Cause Foundation shows people who are reminded of generosity and social justice – even very subtly – are more likely to support environmental policies than those who are reminded of financial success and status, without any mention of the environment. So encourage people to value the welfare of others!

### 2. Don't encourage self-centred values

When we remind people of self-centred values, we motivate them around personal ambition, materialism and status. Research shows these values make people behave in a way that's more selfish, anti-social and apathetic about our environment in that moment. By focusing on individual benefits, people are more likely to ignore other people, our planet and our common good.

**Hot tip!** Talk about people and planet – not dollars and cents. We're not slaves to the economy. Outcomes for people and planet really matters, not dollar output.

## EXAMPLE: ADANI'S MINE

Should we stop Adani's mine because it will become a stranded asset? Or because it will damage our climate?



- If money is the most important criteria or value and the mine stacks up financially, it should go ahead, regardless of the other consequences.
- If we focus on the wellbeing of our communities and planet, then even if the mine could make a lot of money, it's still mustn't go ahead because the it would fuel billions of tonnes of climate pollution, damage groundwater and trash the rights of Traditional Owners.

## 2. Most **people** care

### How to **reinforce that most people care**

- > Remember, **most people care** – they are generous, socially minded and empathetic
- > Our job is not to convince uncaring people to start caring – it's to encourage people they can **make a difference** and show them how!
- > Encourage **compassionate values**, not selfish ones



It's not uncommon to feel like you're one of very few people who worry about stopping climate damage and extinction. But research shows most people do care – they're just not sure how they can make a difference.

## MOST PEOPLE CARE

Research shows while people might believe others are selfish and do not care about our environment, they are mistaken. Common Cause Foundation calls this a 'perception gap.'

In fact, the majority of people in Australia – and around the world – care about the wellbeing of others and our living world.

**Most people are generous, socially minded and empathetic.** Most of us would prefer to live in a place where everyone is treated with respect and decency, and where we don't hurt others or damage or the natural gifts on which we and the rest of the living world depend.

**People who care – like most us – are actually the majority, and it is vital to remind people of this.**

We often look for social proof – guidance or hints on how to behave and what to think, especially in uncertain situations. **It's powerful to show people that others like them care and are getting involved.**

## WHO SHOULD YOU TRY ENGAGE ON FACEBOOK?

Out in Facebook land, there are three big groups of people:

- **Base** (25% of the population): people who are concerned about environmental issues. These people might like our Facebook page or engage with our content. Encourage them to talk to their friends, share stuff, do stuff and get involved!
- **Persuadables** (around 50% of the population): These people probably care about nature! They just might not think about environmental issues much or know what they can do about them. We can persuade these people these issues are urgent and they can make a difference. Encourage them to get involved by talking about why you care, why these issues matter, how they impact the people they love and harm our planet.
- **Opposition** (around 25%): People who are fundamentally opposed to a worldview of protecting nature – they might not believe in climate change and think Adani's mine should go ahead regardless of the environmental impact. Life's short and it's very difficult to change firmly-held views – so use your energy inspiring the base and persuadables to get involved.

## LOOK FOR COMMON GROUND

Although some people love to argue on the internet, there's often more that unites than divides us. People often get defensive or angry when they're told they're wrong – so try to focus on what we share (even the smallest thing) and be polite. Try to set the tone – always respond to people politely and respectfully. And know when to walk away. Don't get into shouting matches – reply once or twice, then move on.

## BUT DON'T FEED THE TROLLS

Free speech is great! But trolls are not. Facebook is like a dinner party. Passionate debate can be fun, but keep it respectful and polite. Insults are not okay. It's your job to make sure everyone feels welcome, so if anyone's rude or unkind, step in to intervene. Trying to convince oppositional people isn't the best use of time and energy.

## SHOW PEOPLE HOW THEY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Our most important task is not to convince uncaring people to start caring – it's to encourage people they can make a difference and show them how!

Remind people they're not alone but part of a huge community of people who care. And emphasise how together, with power power, we can change the world.



# 3. Talk about why this **really matters**

## How to **talk about what matters**

- > Use simple, plain language. Describe things for an **eight-year-old** to get to the heart of what matters
- > Describe **lived experiences** – the air we breathe, the water we drink
- > Be social – not boring! Have conversations and **talk like a real person**
- > Keep it **short and sweet**

Use plain language! Stories resonate when they describe things people can relate to. So talk about what really matters – not reducing CO2 emissions and baseline power, but stopping companies burning coal and gas.

## PEOPLE ARE NOT RATIONAL CALCULATING MACHINES

Giving people lists of facts and graphs hasn't yet solved climate change or environmental destruction – because people are not dispassionate calculating machines, who make reasoned decisions.

Instead, we think with our hearts – through frames, values and stories.

This doesn't mean facts don't matter – they are crucial. But the only reason we pay attention to facts is when we have emotional associations with them

**So tell stories about the moral and emotional importance of facts. And talk about feelings – like love! And outrage!**

## TALK LIKE A REAL PERSON

People are busy and social media is full of noise. So be genuine! Talk like a real human being – like you're talking to a friend.

## USE THE 8-YEAR-OLD TEST

When you're surrounded by campaign-speak and scientific and bureaucratic jargon every day, it's easy to forget that not everyone knows everything about all the things.

**Explain things in plain language, like you're talking to an 8-year-old** – not to dumb down what you're talking about, but to reach the fundamental essence of what you are trying to explain. Don't pretend to be an expert.

Would an 8-year-old understand an Emissions Reduction Scheme or a Renewable Energy Target? Jargon aside, these policies are ultimately about stopping companies digging up and burning coal and encouraging people to use clean energy like wind and solar. So go back to the basics and talk about that - in plain language!



Australian Conservation Foundation shared World Economic Forum's video. \*\*\*

Published by Jessica Sandral [?] · January 17 · 🌐

Digging up and burning fuels like coal and gas is costing people their lives and damaging our planet 😞

The time to act is now.

Malcolm Turnbull must listen to the people. Stop the big polluters and let us harvest 100% clean energy from the sun and wind 🌞💪



## TELL STORIES ABOUT REAL EXPERIENCES

**Tell stories and people will listen – especially stories involving people and animals, rather than just facts and processes.**

A handful of companies are polluting the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. People can relate to language about other people.

**Tell stories about solutions and what they will give us – don't get stuck in the unintelligible nitty gritty of policy mechanisms.**

Use specific, visceral, tangible and descriptive language.

## BE SOCIAL - NOT BORING!

Facebook is not a lecture, it's a conversation. People are there voluntarily, so if you lecture or rant at them, they will walk away. Ask questions, reply to comments, share interesting stuff, have conversations.

See 'talk about why this really matters', below.



## KEEP IT SHORT AND SWEET

There's no word limit for Facebook, but don't write a novel. Posts with less than 250 characters get 60% more engagement.

# 4. We are **part of nature**, not apart from it

## How to **connect people to nature**

- > Don't separate people from nature. Remember, we're all connected to the web of life, and when humans harm nature we're harming ourselves.
- > Help people fall in love with nature – big old trees, fluffy numbat babies and legless lizards are incredible!
- > Don't talk about 'the environment' or 'species' – use evocative language

One of the biggest drivers of planetary destruction is that over generations, we've become disconnected from nature. It's vital we remind people we're all part of a fragile web of life. Break that web and everything unravels.

## DISCONNECTION IS DRIVING DESTRUCTION

National media, television and political debates seem to forget that by damaging our climate, polluting our air and water and destroying habitat, humans are destabilising the very foundation that makes life possible. A key challenge is to reconnect people to nature, so our society recognises that by damaging our living planet, humans are damaging ourselves.

## NOT JUST 'THE ENVIRONMENT'

Try to find alternatives to the word 'the environment' – it's far away and abstract. **The word has become a sterile thing that's devoid of life and colour, and it's harder to be passionate about lifeless things.** Instead, talk about:

- Our living world, our living planet, nature, the web of life
- Rivers, forests, people, animals, reefs, oceans
- We are part of a community of living things – of moss and sugar gliders, dugongs and mountain ash, ants and people and big old trees

Same thing with the word 'species'.

Nature doesn't only exist to serve us humans – so try not to talk only our living world as if it's a service. Instead, we are part of huge and diverse community of living things.

If you are talking about protecting nature or places, think about how you could name the threat specifically, a choice that can address the threat, and describe a thriving future for life in that place if that choice is made.

## BE A PROUD TREE-HUGGER

Recent research shows 63% of Australians surveyed see themselves as an environmentalist at heart – so be a tree hugger, and be proud of it!

The reason many people get involved in environmental campaigns is because of love – they love nature, animals, people and our planet. So rather than only talking about problems or technological solutions, remind people how incredible our living world is and encourage them to fall in love with it again.

# 5. Have a dream 🌱

## Have a dream

- > People have 99 problems and don't need any more – so **give them something to believe in**, something worth striving for
- > Don't just aim for a less awful future or a non-apocalyptic climate – we want to live in a place where everyone can have a good life
- > Talk about **beautiful cakes – outcomes!** – not just recipes, policies or paperwork.



Reforming, fixing, mitigating and improving things is important and necessary, but just fixing something bad is not so inspiring. Instead, have a dream – a vision for something good!

## PEOPLE HAVE 99 PROBLEMS

The world is saturated with problems, and people don't need any more. Instead of always focus on everything that's broken and wrong, inspire people with a vision – something worth getting out of bed for. Talk about what you're *for*, not just what you're *against*.

## OFFER SOMETHING WORTH GETTING OUT OF BED FOR

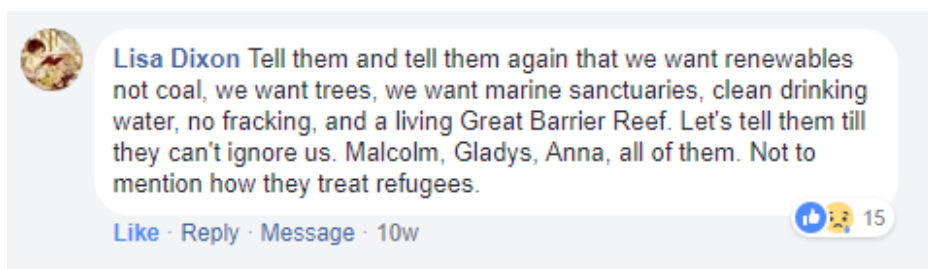
Rather than making the future a little less terrible – even though that may feel accurate – give people something to believe in. Like a future that's even more beautiful than today. A world where we can thrive. A place where our kids can enjoy a good life. Creating safe and healthy communities with clean air and water.

## FOCUS ON CAKES, NOT JUST RECIPES

Politics and campaign organisations often talk about processes to fix problems – like law reform, ending subsidies and renewable energy schemes. But ending a subsidy or making a scheme is the means, not the end. It's hard to feel passionate about a scheme or reform.

A policy is only as good as what it allows you to do, so don't focus on policy debates, process or paperwork – the recipe. Instead, talk about the outcome – the cake itself:

- Spending time with your baby (not a 'paid parental leave scheme')
- Stopping companies damaging our climate (not pollution abatement scheme)
- Animals at risk of extinction have safe places to live (not investing in nature priorities)



# 6. People do things – so have **heroes and villains**

## **How to:** People do things

- > Climate change and land clearing aren't happening on their own. So be clear about **who's doing what and why**.
- > Talk about **clear villains** who we can work together to stop.
- > Emphasise **people power** and invite others to join in
- > Don't undermine democracy – critique the behaviour of individual politicians but we need **good governments** to step up and solve these issues!

So many issues seem overwhelming and impossible to change. But 90 companies globally are responsible for two thirds of the world's climate damage. They have CEOs with names and addresses – and we can stop them.

## THE PROBLEM WITH FACELESS FORCES & INVISIBLE HANDS

Climate change isn't happening on its own. Inappropriate development didn't grow arms and legs and threaten bushland. This damage is caused by people doing things – like digging up and burning coal and bulldozing forests.

When we imply bad things are just happening on their own, we make it seem like we can't do anything about any of it. We can't lobby climate change or send petitions to inappropriate development or structural disadvantage's offices.

## PEOPLE DO THINGS

Make sure you talk about people doing things, and be clear what they are and are not doing. This includes:

### 1. Compelling villains

Compelling villains help us grasp the true nature of the dangers and threats we face. Like Adani – a billionaire miner who wants to dig a megamine near the reef (it is completely irrelevant that he's Indian – be careful only to criticise his actions, never his race, personality etc). Focusing on Adani makes climate damage a moral story about greed and power.

- Instead of stopping climate change, focus on stopping big polluting companies digging up and burning coal, and damaging our climate.
- Instead of stopping extinction, focus on stopping logging companies demolishing the habitat that's home to threatened plants and animals.
- Instead of lamenting there's not enough water in the Murray Darling Basin, focus on stopping corporate megafarms and rogue irrigators bleeding our rivers dry.



**Australian Conservation Foundation**

Published by Jessica Sandral [?] · March 26 at 12:30pm · 🌐

...

Loggers want to destroy our national parks and water catchments.

We need stronger national environment laws to protect the places we love.

SIGN NOW 🌳 [www.acf.org.au/big\\_old\\_trees\\_fb](http://www.acf.org.au/big_old_trees_fb)

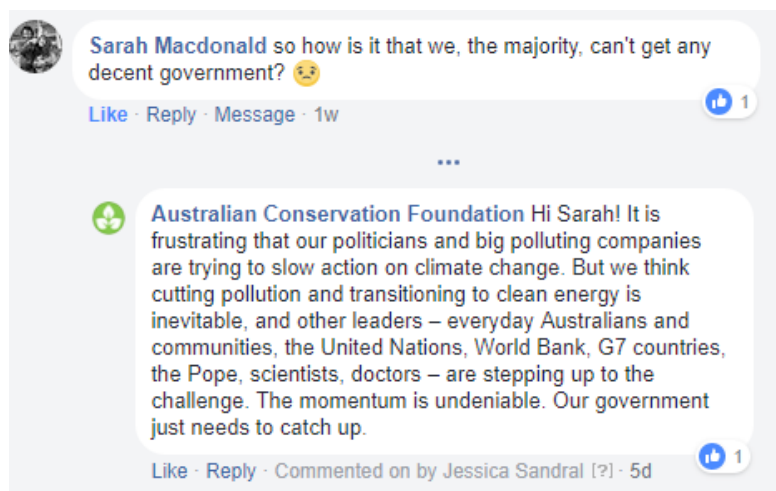


## 2. Protagonists

Talk about **protagonists** people can identify with – who invite our audience to join them and enter the story as agents of change.

- People with lived experience are often powerful protagonists – such as people impacted by coalmines, bushfires and reef bleaching; people harmed by rogue irrigators stealing river water; people who care for endangered animals. We all have lived experience of climate damage – so our own everyday experiences and concerns are powerful!

A big way to stop villains damaging our planet is people power – people who care, speaking out to demand change.



### 3. Government

These days, people across the world have record-low faith in government.

But democracy – and our elected representatives listening to the people who elect them and making wise decisions – is essential to solving the many challenges we face.

Research shows when we say ‘this politician is bad’, people hear ‘government is bad’ and ‘democracy is broken.’ But this is a problem when we can’t stop climate damage or habitat destruction without governments stepping up and acting. So instead of always criticising government:

- Talk about what a government can and should do. A good government would make laws to stop companies damaging our climate. A good government would listen to the people, not polluting companies. A good government would stop people destroying nature.
- Call a spade a spade, so when you need to criticise government decisions, bring it back to our vision and values, name the politician and be specific about their bad choice/behaviour
- The real villain is often the coal lobby sweet talking our elected representatives, not politicians themselves
- Have a specific vision for how a better economy/policy would work



**Australian Conservation Foundation**

Published by Jessica Sandral [?] · March 28 at 3:24pm · 🌐

Minister Canavan's announcement of a resource task-force to promote dirty fossil fuels is hardly surprising but deeply concerning.

The Turnbull Government should not be spending public money on a public relations campaign for big polluting companies.

Instead our government should be acting to safeguard our clean air and water, and ensure that local communities are responsibly supported in the transition towards clean energy.

Australians want clean energy. Yet this is a ridiculous attempt to revive a dirty, outdated and unpopular industry.



**Philip White** There needs to be stronger environmental protection laws to deter the giant corporations from plundering our limited national assets

Like · Reply · Message · 7w



2



**Australian Conservation Foundation** Absolutely, Philip! Let's make sure our elected representatives know this as well! 🙌

Like · Reply · Commented on by Isabel Kimpton [?] · 7w



1



**Philip White** And we will remind them of what being an elected representative entails

Like · Reply · Message · 7w

Creating a world  
where **forests,**  
**rivers, people,**  
**reef and wildlife**  
**thrive** 