



Report on the ‘Who Should Pay’ survey

Created by Friends of the Earth (Melbourne) after the January 2026 fires in Victoria

V5. May 2026

Introduction to the survey

In January and February 2026 major fires impacted significant areas of Victoria. More than 400,000 hectares of bushland and farmland have burned. Hundreds of homes were destroyed or damaged across the state, there was massive loss of farm animals and countless numbers of wildlife died. These fires led to many thousands of claims being made to insurers. Every time there is a costly natural disaster, like a flood or bushfire, the financial burden on insurance companies increases and in turn it is the consumers who are impacted by higher insurance premiums.

Across the state we can see the impacts of cumulative disasters - roads are damaged and councils struggle to fix them. Farms require clean up and re-fencing, often relying on the many good people who volunteer their time and labour and bring in feed. Firefighters need a huge support network to be able to sustain their efforts on the fire grounds. All of this costs money and ultimately it is the community who pays.

We wanted to understand community sentiment towards who should pay for the economic costs of more frequent bushfires.

Fire impacts - who should pay? Are there alternatives to the Emergency Services levy?

In Victoria the state government has created the Emergency Services and Volunteers Levy, which is intended to contribute funds for emergency services like the SES, CFA, Triple Zero Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, Forest Fire Management Victoria, the State Control Centre and Emergency Recovery

Victoria. It is an annual property levy collected via council rates, and replaced the Fire Services Property Levy.

The levy stirred controversy after many farmers faced increases of tens of thousands of dollars a year in what they pay. And in response, the government introduced a two-year rate freeze to the Levy for farmers. However we believe that while all landowners benefit from emergency services and therefore should be expected to pay a fair contribution towards the Levy, in its current form it does represent an unfair burden on rural and especially farming communities.

As the state government considers its future options on what form the levy will take, we continue to call for a federal disaster levy to be put on all fossil fuel exports from Australia. Such a levy could raise billions of dollars every year to pay the costs of climate change, without raising prices in Australia. These funds could be allocated to states and territories to be directed towards emergency services, building community resilience, disaster response and recovery. This would greatly relieve the burden being carried by average Australians.

We believe that ratepayers shouldn't be expected to pay for the damage caused by coal, gas and oil companies. A levy would force them to contribute to the problems they are causing. Obviously a state government cannot introduce a federal levy. It can however advocate for it, as a growing number of local Councils are doing across Victoria and around the country.

All people benefit from having well funded fire and emergency services. It is fair and that we all contribute a reasonable amount to these services. Creation of a federal fund could provide funds so that state governments can take a burden off farming families and communities by reducing their levy.

In this survey we wanted to test community support for a levy on fossil fuel exports.

We shared a simple survey asking for people's attitudes:

- Were they impacted by this summer's fires
- Whether they think fire seasons are getting longer and more intense (and if so why)
- Who should be paying for the increasing costs

How was it circulated

Initially via members and supporters of Friends of the Earth, and directly to regional communities via our personal contacts (email). There was significant outreach to community networks, especially regional and issue specific facebook groups in regional Victoria, which have been widely used during the fires to share information and co-ordinate community responses. It was also shared through online fire fighting pages and groups.

How big is this data set?

This report is based on 450 responses, with the following demographics.

Area	Number of responses
Regional Victoria (rural & regional centres)	160
Castlemaine/ Harcourt area	72
North eastern VIC	49
TOTAL regional:	281
Metro Melbourne	100
Interstate	65
unknown	4

TOTAL OF RESPONSES	450
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Castlemaine/ Harcourt

We identified the Castlemaine/ Harcourt area as being significant given the impacts of this summer’s fires and wanted to understand if being exposed to a major disaster like the Fogartys Gap/ Harcourt fire would influence attitudes to fossil fuel companies.

Of the 72 people from Barkers Creek, Campbells Creek, Castlemaine, Chewton, Elphinstone, Harcourt, Harcourt North and Sutton Grange who responded, 67 said they supported the tax proposal.

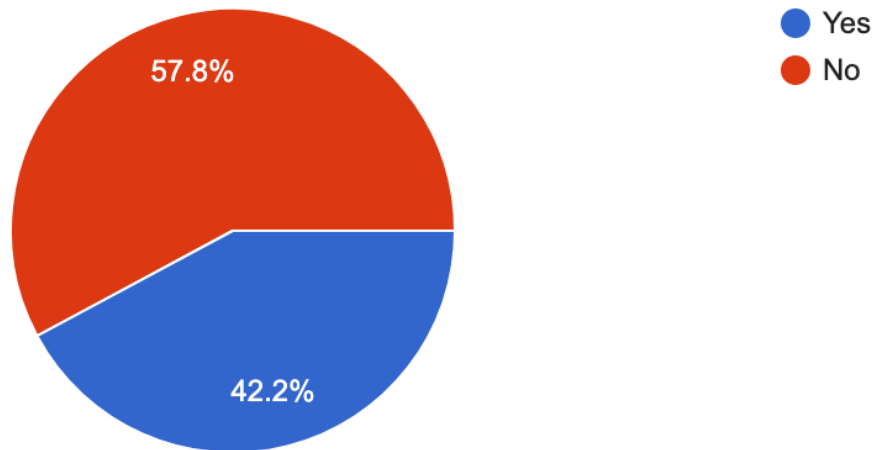
North east Victoria

We also received good responses from this region (impacted by the Lockwood and Walwa fires) which also demonstrated strong support for the tax proposal.

Results

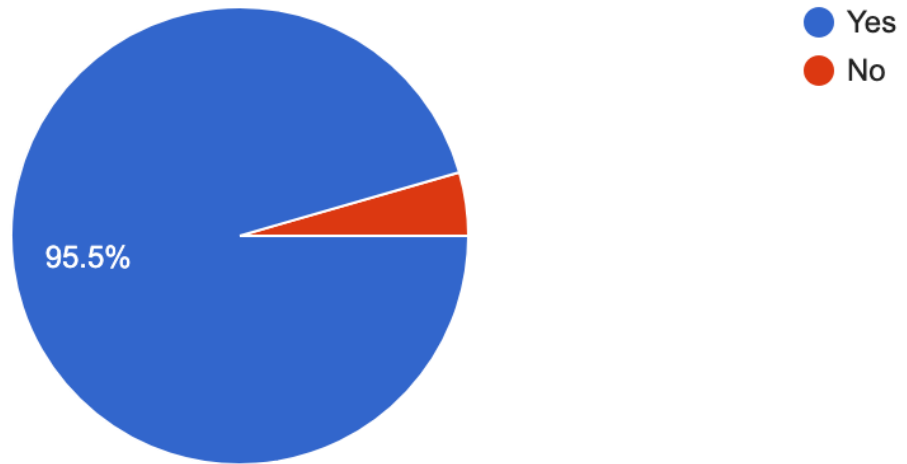
Were you impacted by the recent fires?

446 responses



Do you think fire seasons are getting worse and more intense?

446 responses



The screen grab below is indicative of the responses we got – overwhelmingly focused on human induced global warming as the single greatest cause of longer and more intense fire seasons.

- Deforestation and Mining.
- climate change, habitat fragmentation
- More unstable weather patterns
- Anthropogenic climate change and poor forest management practices.
- climate change -
- Global warming caused by climate change and the burning of fossil fuels.
- Not reducing carbon emissions
- Anthropogenic Climate Change/Global Warming & the lack of government action to stop it increasing.
- Climate Change is driving natural disasters and this means more fires, more often with greater intensity.

However the detail of the responses is worth delving into. As an open question, people could offer multiple reasons, which are summarised below.

Reason given for fire seasons getting worse	Number of mentions
Climate change (global heating, global warming, climate disruption, climate breakdown, human induced global warming, climate crisis, etc)	277

Reference to the weather without mention of climate change (hotter weather, more drought, longer summers, unstable weather, etc)	60
No reason given	41
I don't know	4
Not enough fuel reduction burning	19
Roadsides not managed	4
Too much or damaging fuel reduction burning	11
Less firewood gathering	2
Natural variation (incl declining solar activity)	10
Reliance on animal agriculture	2
Land clearing/ habitat fragmentation & destruction	21
Poor land management	22
Ground water – overextraction drying soil	4
Mining	4
Over consumption by humans	2
Big business/ corporates/ capitalism	6
Government inaction	5
No indigenous land management, incl cool burns	5
'greenie protests'/ green groups	5
Conspiracy theories	3

Specific mention of fossil fuels leading to climate change: 54

Who should pay

In the Black Summer fires of 2019/20, the role of climate change in making fire seasons longer and more intense was deeply contested by the conservative media (especially The Australian), and conservative MPs and commentators in general.

Our sense this summer was that the debate has profoundly shifted, with regular media reporting on possible links with global warming. In creating the survey we wanted to understand the following questions:

- Do people connect the worsening fire conditions with climate change
- Do they specifically link the use of fossil fuels with climate change
- In a state where there is deep resentment in regional areas about the new Emergency Services and Volunteers levy (ESVL), would a counter proposal, focused on the suggestion that we tax fossil fuel companies, resonate with the community

Based on the results (albeit from a green ENGO skewed demographic) the results suggest that many people understand the links and are willing to see a fossil fuel levy as an alternative to the ESVL.

As the data set grew, there was more input from conservatives who are less likely to agree with climate science being a cause for worse seasons and more likely to cite reasons like lack of fuel reduction burning or general 'changing weather' observations. Yet among these groups there is still strong support for a levy on transnational companies who are making profits off Australian resources.

Please note that the table below has cut out some categories, which should read:

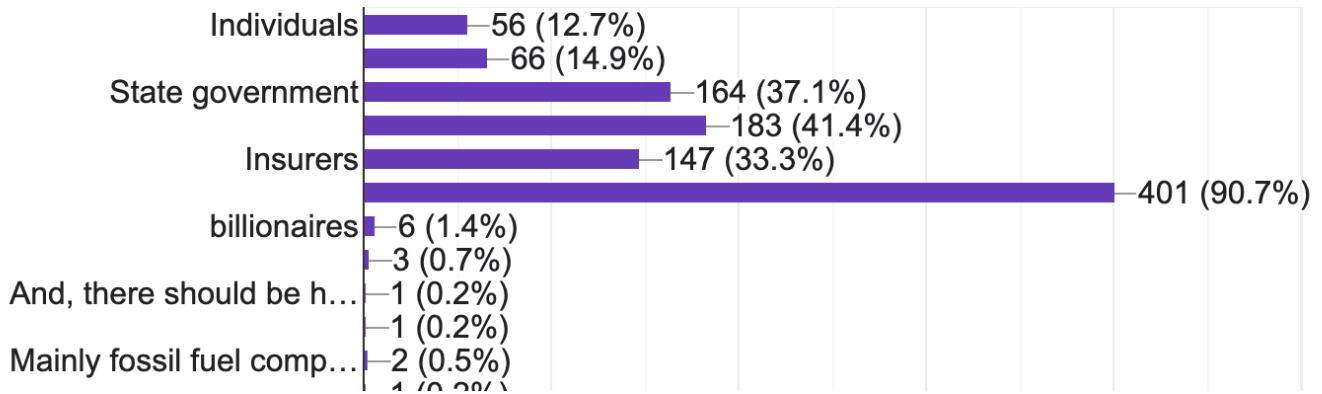
Who should pay (multiple choice question)

Individuals 12.7%

Local government	14.9%
State government	37.1%
Federal government	41.4%
Insurers	33.3%
Fossil fuel companies	90.7%

Who should pay for the damage being caused by fires? (select all that apply)

442 responses

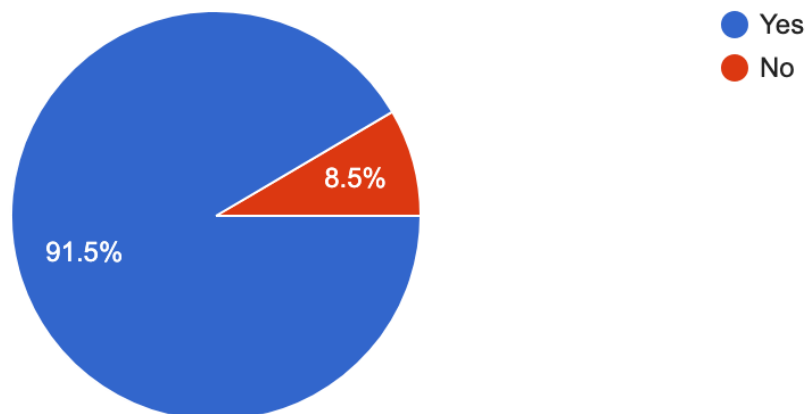


Views on the responses to the fossil fuel levy

A climate disaster levy on fossil fuel exports from Australia could raise billions of dollars every year to pay the costs of climate change, without raising prices in Australia.

Would you support a proposal to tax fossil fuel companies to create a national climate disaster fund which would then allocate funds to emergency services, building resilience and disaster recovery?

448 responses



Detail on the responses

While there was overwhelming support for the idea of a levy, there are some interesting things to note:

- Even people who don't believe in climate change resoundingly think it's a good idea to tax the large corporations properly for the resources they are using
- There was frequent commentary that many people do see it as an alternative to the state level emergency services levy
- Some people felt we should focus more on a full phase out of fossil fuels rather than taxing them
- There was frequent reference to the current national debate about applying a meaningful levy on fossil fuel exporters
- Many people directly linked the burning of fossil fuels with climate change impacts

Some responses from participants:

Absolutely we need to tax those companies more, and all corporations actually

A climate disaster levy will provoke furious fightback from the fossil fuel industry but it must be implemented.

Climate activists and environmental advocates have been warning about the threats from climate change for decades and fossil fuel companies knew the risks they were taking - they have made their record profits for long enough. It is time to pay for the damage.

We have to drive the cost of the response to climate change from those who are impacted onto those who are causing it.

These companies make huge profits and pay little tax leading to an increase in inequality.

It might be socially/politically strategic currently to campaign for a tax on Fossil Fuel companies to 'raise the money' required for a disaster relief fund. At the same time it concedes the higher ground by saying that we NEED money from fossil fuel companies to create a diasaster relief fund. The reality is the federal governemnt has the currency issuing capcity to purchase whatever is for sale - if its a available and required after a disaster, the federal government can do it. They don't need money from fossil fuel companies to do it. Think COVID Job Keeper, submarines etc.. By taxing Fossil Fuel companies, we need them to stay profitable inorder to support a disaster relief fund. The higher ground is to regulate fossil fuel companies out of existance, simply say in 5 years we will no longer dig up coal, and use our public money for what we need to do.

nationalise the fossil fuel industries without compensation, and rapidly phase them out while using any profits in the meantime to pay for disaster recovery.

no need for a climate tax, just tax the fossil fuel companies as they should be and the nation will return to surplus.

I don't support a "climate tax" on fossil fuels. This will be politicised and vulnerable likely to be passed onto individuals. I do however support taxing the crap out of them in general with what they are owed, to ensure Australia is not handing away its resources for free. In doing this budgets should return to surplus and we will have room to manage environmental impacts of humanity.

tax all the bastards

We are putting a state fire levy on our land rates when it is not the farmers and land owners that are causing these fire storms. The fossil fuel companies are driving climate change so should be bearing the cost of their greed.

it would be better to ban fossil fuels altogether

Generally I am very wary of taxing fossil fuel exports as such a strategy is not helpful in eliminating them. But a disaster fund is a good idea.

Insurance needs to be capped. I have paid insurance for 40 years and never claimed, yet they doubled my premium this year to more than \$5000.

I would like to see Insurance companies donate to the CFA in cases where the heroic action of the CFA saved the company from a large claim - in our case approaching \$700,000.

Expecting volunteer CFA brigades to face catastrophic fires every year is absolutely exploitative and abusive. Gone are the days where CFA members focussed on local and usually manageable fires. The risk, health impacts are now unacceptable

The views of firefighters

We received responses from 21 people who said they were involved in firefighting this summer. Of these the majority (19) blamed climate change for fire seasons getting longer, and the vast majority supported a levy on companies that export fossil fuels like coal and gas.

What next?

Based on the responses received, we feel that it is worth pursuing a much larger outreach into regional communities to better understand views and build support for a fossil fuel levy as an alternative to the Emergency Services levy. If we are successful in building engagement we will do a subsequent report.

There was an incredible breadth of wisdom and reflection in the commentary questions (Is there anything else you would like to say?, Do you have specific needs we might be able to assist you with?) which we will try to compile and share in the next report.

We finish with these two quotes from participants.

The Harcourt fire was an inferno. Towns are no longer safe in conditions like that.

Climate change is an existential threat. We must pull out all stops to mitigate and adapt.

You can fill the survey out here >

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScOldQu_iHWWzB7Cfphdajh-tv3KvLi1l8iN1XOyiEhXY9Yw/viewform?usp=dialog

We will do updates occasionally as the dataset continues to grow.