Messaging: Climate Change and Victorian Bushfires

January 13 2026

Context

Fires have devastated parts of Victoria, and further dangerous fire conditions are expected in late January with peak fire danger typically in February. Authorities say about a dozen fires are still active across the state of Victoria and have impacted many essential services including power, water and transport. As of Wednesday, January 14, the fires that got out of control on Jan 9 during a heatwave have claimed:

- One man's life
- 1000 structures (including 400 homes)
- More than 400,000 hectares burnt (a total area more than five times the size of Singapore)
- More than 15 000 head of livestock lost (expected to climb)

Key Messaging

1. **Climate pollution is driving more explosive fire conditions. This increases the risk of bad fires turning disastrous, just like Victorians experienced over the past week.**
    - Climate pollution loads the dice for more extreme fire weather by driving:
        - More hot days, extremely hot days, and hotter and longer heatwaves;
        - A drying trend, with less cool season rainfall in southeast Australia since the 1990s;
        - Volatile swings between extreme wet and dry conditions (known as "climate whiplash") that turns landscapes into tinderboxes; and
        - Longer fire seasons since the 1970s.
    - Fires are now so intense, they generate their own fire thunderstorms. Pyro-cumulonimbus clouds (pyroCb) were considered outlier events, but are now more frequent. Up to 2018, 60 such events were recorded in Australia over 40 years. But during Black Summer in 2019-2020 there were at least 45 fire-generated thunderstorms recorded.
    - Climate change is also raising temperatures at night, and robbing firefighters of an opportunity they once relied on to get blazes under control.

2. **Burning more coal, oil and gas is like pouring petrol on a fire.**

a. Scientists have declared 2025 the third hottest year globally on record, driven by pollution from coal, oil and gas.
b. Globally, the past 11 years have been the hottest ever documented.
c. Pollution from coal, oil and gas is heating our atmosphere and oceans, and driving worsening extreme weather. In the first few weeks of this year, Australians in different parts of the country have experienced heatwaves, floods and fires.

3. **All Australians are paying the price for worsening fire events supercharged by climate pollution.**
    - Insurance premiums in bushfire-prone suburbs of Sydney, Melbourne and Perth have jumped 78–138% since 2020.
    - Even those who don't live in the path of fires or floods, are paying for more insurance today, because climate-fuelled weather everywhere means higher insurance for everyone.
    - The full social and economic costs of the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria were estimated to be as high as $7 billion (Deloitte Australia 2016). The cost of the 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires to the Australian economy was estimated to be $10 billion (Commonwealth of Australia 2024).

Can Say	Can't say
Climate pollution is driving more explosive fire conditions	Climate change *caused* these specific Victoria fires. (Note: attribution for specific events takes time)
Climate change is increasing fire risk	Fires are natural / normal part of summer

Common Questions / Answers

Were these specific fires caused by climate change?
We know that overall, climate pollution, from the burning of coal, oil and gas is supercharging our weather and making events like this more likely.

So what started the fires?

Whatever the cause - we know that fires are harder to contain and control on extremely hot days such as Friday when temperatures soared over 40℃, particularly when fanned by strong, gusty winds. Climate pollution is driving hotter, more volatile conditions in which such fires rage out of control.

Media reports suggest the Longwood fire which destroyed buildings in Ruffy was started by a trailer releasing sparks on the Hume Highway into bone-dry scrub.

Others were likely started by dry lightning, which studies suggest is becoming more widespread and likely as our planet overheats.

Are fires worse because we haven't been burning off / doing fuel reduction burns?
Climate change is robbing firefighters of the chance to do fuel reduction burning, because they can only burn when conditions are right (not too hot and windy or too wet). For example, in NSW over the past four years only a fraction of scheduled burning has taken place because vegetation has often been too wet to burn. The wetter conditions are a double-edged sword - while reducing the immediate risk of bushfires, they also promote prolific growth of vegetation that eventually dries out and becomes fuel for larger fires.

Australia has always had fires. There's records going back to the 1800s.
Experts are clear: fire conditions in Australia are materially worse today because of climate pollution, from the burning of coal, oil and gas, and we're all paying the price of that:

- Victoria's 2009 Black Saturday fires were so intense that another category of fire danger "catastrophic" had to be created to describe those never-before-seen conditions.
- Black Summer in 2019-2020 broke nearly every record we had with fires joining up from Queensland to Victoria.
- Climate change is also drying landscapes that have previously been too wet to burn: for example, rainforests in the Daintree in Far North Queensland and parts of Tasmania that had never experienced fires.
- Every Australian is paying higher insurance premiums today, because climate-fuelled extreme weather events including fires are becoming more intense and frequent.

What we do now to cut pollution won't make a difference for disasters this summer
It will make a tangible difference to our kids, and to future summers. Summers used to be all about holiday fun, now for many Australians they are a time of dread: with frenetic emergency alerts. Every kilogram of pollution from coal, oil and gas we can avoid makes a difference, by reducing the risks of even worse conditions.