

Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

17 April 2026

Submission to the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee on the 2026 Victoria Summer Fires

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on behalf of Geelong Sustainability to the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee.

About Geelong Sustainability

[Geelong Sustainability](#) is a for-purpose community organisation and registered charity that exists to build a powerful community movement for a just transition to a net zero future. Our vision is a thriving and resilient community taking urgent action on climate change together.

Since our establishment in 2007, Geelong Sustainability has become the region's leading sustainability group with over 20,000 supporters as well as extensive networks in community, government and business throughout Geelong and the Barwon region. We have 147 members, over 50 active volunteers, and over 20,000 supporters throughout the region.

We are recognised for our evidence-based innovative projects, which educate and support our community's transition to a net zero future.

Geelong Sustainability is committed to working towards—and advocating for—urgent climate action to meet our net zero commitments and protect future generations.

Responses to the Terms of Reference

We draw upon both our organisational and personal experiences in responding to the Terms of Reference, as well as a deep and compelling body of evidence.

(2) the causes and circumstances of the bushfires, including climate change and the adequacy of the Government's climate policies and actions, forecasts, warnings and public education on bushfire threats

While bushfires have long been a feature of the Australian landscape, there is unequivocal evidence that extreme bushfire weather has increased in recent decades. [Victoria's Climate Science Report 2024](#) states that: "A range of changes in fire regimes, activity and drivers in Victoria have already been observed, including a longer fire season, with more frequent days of significant fire danger. These changes are likely to escalate with increasing global temperatures." There has been an increase in forest fires despite a decline in total forest area due to land clearing and an increase in fire suppression.

In terms of future changes, the same report warns: "Fire weather and fire activity are projected to increase in many regions of south-east Australia". Such warnings are not new - The Bureau of Meteorology, CSIRO and several of our universities have been providing warnings for decades.

Given the devastating nature of bushfires on Victoria's communities, environment and economy, these facts alone warrant critical and urgent attention to reducing carbon emissions, both in Australia and those exported overseas. There also needs to be an acceleration in the rollout of renewables and batteries across Victoria and ensuring that all communities can participate and benefit financially. We must also ensure that we adapt to the increasing risks by following the recommendations of our bushfire experts, including those engaged in operations and research. Community participation and engagement is essential.

As the risks from climate change continue to increase we need early warning systems to keep pace and this means increasing investments in weather and climate observations, predictions and warnings. It also means improving our scientific understanding and making the best use of supercomputing, weather and climate modelling, remotely sensed data, and (without exacerbating our energy, emissions and water problems) advances in AI.

Increasing bushfire risks also mean increasing the existing public education programs and briefings. Since too many Victorians still don't appreciate that climate change is increasing these risks, the public also needs to be informed and educated on these matters. The Climate Council has created a practical conversation guide ['This is not normal: Explaining Bushfires and Climate Change'](#) to help people explain clearly and confidently how climate change is driving "more explosive fire conditions".

(9) the prevalence and impact of misinformation leading into and during the fire season

The 2025–26 Victorian bushfire season has been accompanied by multiple forms of misinformation and disinformation (hereafter 'mis/disinformation'), including false claims about arson, misleading fire maps, politicised narratives about environmental policies, and

social media amplification. These narratives can undermine trust in emergency authorities, distort understanding of fire risk, and polarise debate about climate change and land management.

Geelong Sustainability's [submission to the Select Committee on Information Integrity on Climate Change and Energy](#) described our concerns and offered several actions that would help in reducing the incidence of mis/disinformation.

Mis/disinformation on climate change and the energy transition have contributed to poor policy development, slowed climate action and created confusion within the Australian public and business community. The high prevalence of this is evident through numerous examples and respondents in the report of the 2021 Senate Environment and Communications Reference Committee's Inquiry into Media Diversity.

The impacts of mis/disinformation have been severe, and we know there are much worse impacts to come. The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2026 ranks 'misinformation and disinformation' as the second top-ranked short- to medium-term concern across all risk categories. For several years running, climate-related risks have dominated the highest risks over the next 10 years. Inequality and social polarisation rank highly on both timescales.

Clearly, by not addressing mis/disinformation, we exacerbate the already unacceptable risks to society from climate change. Unless greater efforts and resources are dedicated to countering mis/disinformation then the risks from climate change will be amplified and, with that, the chances of tackling most of society's other major challenges will be well out of reach.

Solutions and Priorities

The solutions to the escalating bushfire crisis are readily available. What is required is the political will and coordinated investment to implement them at scale. Geelong Sustainability endorses the framework put forward by [Renew Australia for All's Climate Safety Plan](#), which calls on government to make climate readiness a national priority built on fairness and practical action. Key priorities include strengthening the National Construction Code to ensure homes, schools and workplaces are heat-resilient; boosting the emergency services workforce through a dedicated National Emergency Response Brigade; properly resourcing local governments and community organisations to lead resilience work in their own regions; and fully funding the National Climate and Health Strategy so our health system can withstand worsening climate shocks. Critically, the Climate Safety Plan notes that for every dollar invested in resilience and preparedness, Australia saves ten dollars in response and recovery costs — making this not just a moral imperative, but a fiscally responsible one.

At the state level, Victoria must accelerate the rollout of renewable energy and battery storage, expand and improve early warning systems, and deepen public education on climate risk. Vulnerable communities such as renters, low-income households, rural and regional Victorians, must be centred in adaptation planning, not treated as an afterthought. Addressing misinformation about climate change and fire risk must also be treated as a policy priority, as it directly undermines community preparedness and public trust in emergency authorities.

Conclusion

The 2026 Victorian summer fires are not a surprise. They are the foreseeable consequence of decades of warnings going unheeded and climate action being delayed. Geelong Sustainability urges this Committee to treat its findings not as a post-disaster report, but as a mandate for urgent, sustained action on emissions reduction, community resilience, emergency preparedness, and the fight against climate misinformation. The communities of Geelong and across Victoria deserve solutions that meet the scale of this crisis with the seriousness it demands.

Yours sincerely,

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