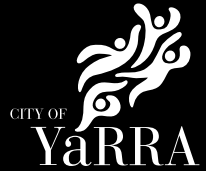
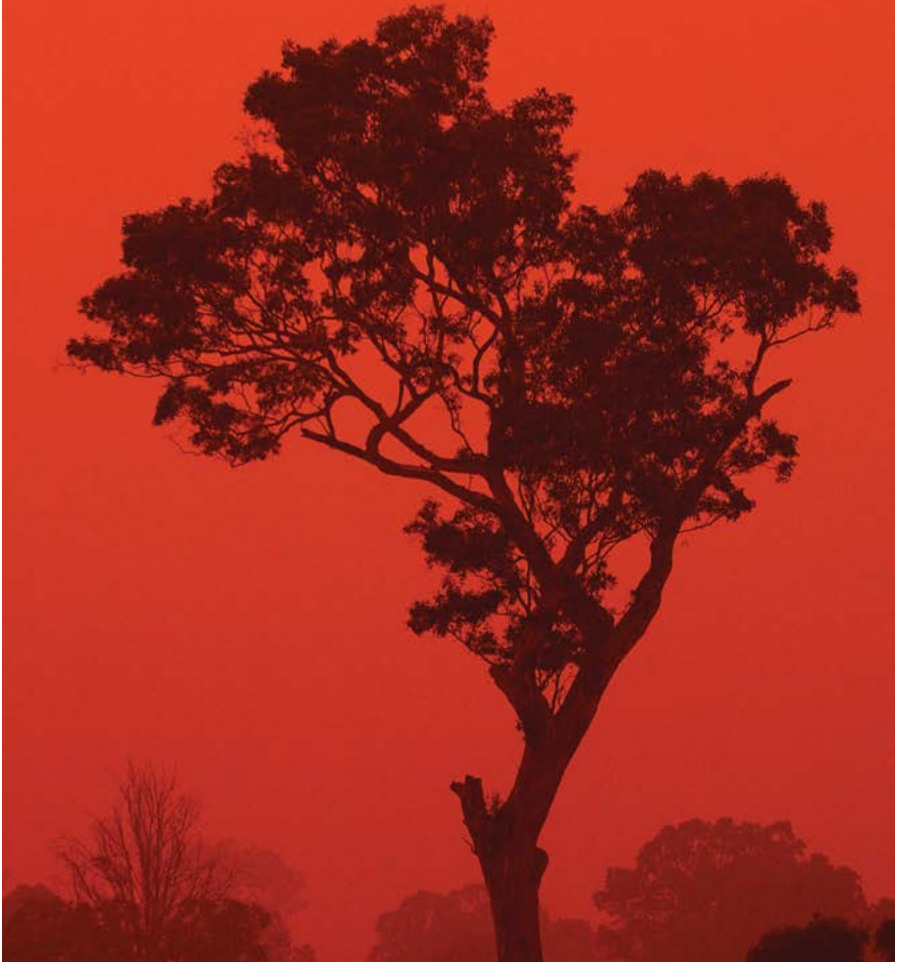


Climate emergency

Taking action together
in the City of Yarra



“Over two decades ago Australian scientists warned that the country could face a climate-change driven bushfire crisis by 2020. It arrived on schedule... Scientists are warning the world that we could face much worse over the next two decades if greenhouse gas emissions don't start a sharp downward trend NOW. Perhaps we should trust them this time.” Professor Will Steffen



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 4 |
| Climate emergency: what is the problem we are facing, and what are the effects of this? | 6 |
| The impacts of the climate emergency in Australia | 10 |
| The impacts of the climate emergency in Yarra | 13 |
| Yarra Council's response to the climate emergency | 15 |
| Working together to create change | 17 |

Acknowledgement

Yarra City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people as the Traditional Owners and true sovereigns of the land now known as Yarra. We also acknowledge the significant contributions made by other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to life in Yarra. We pay our respects to Elders from all nations and to their Elders past, present and future.

Yarra Council would like to thank and acknowledge Darebin Council for their work in creating the original version of this booklet. Some text from the Darebin Council booklet has been used in this version of this booklet.

Introduction

Climate change is a dangerous threat to all life on the planet.
The earth is already too hot.

The climate emergency is extensively documented. The science tells us that the earth has heated, and is continuing to heat, as a result of human activity. This heating is having harmful impacts on people, plants and animals.

Widespread and continuing droughts, frequent floods, heatwaves and bushfires are happening right across the country. Fire seasons are starting earlier and lasting longer, with fires bigger, more intense and more dangerous than we have ever seen before. People have lost their lives, their loved ones, and their homes.¹

The landscapes and wildlife we cherish are suffering. The natural ecosystems which underpin all life are at risk of collapse due to the speed and scale of climate change, the consequent extreme weather events, as well as land clearing and habitat loss.

Yarra Council recognises that the climate emergency presents an unprecedented challenge, and that there is an urgent need to take sustained, collective and large-scale action across all levels of government, businesses and the community. The magnitude of the climate emergency means that incremental change or a business-as-usual response to the crisis is inadequate.

Yarra Council has developed a Climate Emergency Plan setting out its response to the climate emergency. The plan outlines how we are working to accelerate emissions reductions within our own operations and across the community; ensure our infrastructure, assets and community are resilient to climate impacts; and embed climate emergency considerations across Council's strategies, policies and decision-making processes.



The plan also outlines Council's role in bringing our community together and building their capacity to be active citizens working together for change. The sheer scale and complexity of the climate emergency challenge means that we all have a role to play, and that we must work together – the actions of individuals, organisations or sectors alone cannot resolve the emergency.

More than 1,500 (and rising!) governments across 30 countries representing more than 820 million people have declared a climate emergency.² This is a growing global movement demanding urgent and large-scale action in response to what is a crisis for both humans and the natural world.

So what role will you play? No matter what your contribution, your positive action, advocacy and leadership will help build the necessary momentum for change and contribute to the restoration of a healthy climate for all of us.

¹ Climate Council, 2019, *Full Statement from Australian Mayors: Climate Change has grave costs for our community that can no longer be ignored*

² caceonline.org/councils-declared

Climate emergency:

what is the problem we are facing, and what are the effects of this?

Our climate is changing rapidly. The past few decades have seen an unprecedented rate of heating.

Global impacts of the climate emergency

Since 1910, the world's average surface air and sea temperatures have warmed by approximately 1°C. This temperature rise has been caused by the release of greenhouse gases from the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas), and other human activities including agriculture, deforestation, transport and construction.

Greenhouse gases trap heat in the atmosphere and this causes temperatures to rise. Scientists predict that if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise at current rates, by 2100 global average air temperatures will be 4°C above mid-19th century temperatures.³

The impacts of the climate emergency are being felt now. Changes to our global environment resulting from the current warming of 1°C are already evident and include significantly hotter weather, increased and prolonged instances of extreme weather events and natural disasters, climate variability including changes to seasons, and sea level rise.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that warming of 1.5°C or higher significantly increases the risk of long-lasting or irreversible changes, and predicts that we will exceed 1.5°C as early as 2030 if our greenhouse emissions continue at the current rate.

³springer.com



The IPCC states that unless global emissions are halved by 2030 and virtually eliminated by 2050, the risk of mass-extinction, ecosystem loss, drought, floods, extreme heat, and poverty, conflicts and mass migration of hundreds of millions of people as natural disasters and scarcity of food and water increase is high.⁴

Avoiding a catastrophic future means keeping the majority of fossil fuel reserves in the ground and rapidly deploying solar, wind and hydro energy; and changing our high consuming lifestyle.

⁴ United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018, Global Warming of 1.5°C, ipcc.ch

Further Reading

Climate change science

United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

*Special Report: Global Warming
of 1.5°C Summary for
Policymakers, 2018*

ipcc.ch

The Climate Council

*What is Climate Change and
What Can We Do?*

climatecouncil.org.au

Bureau of Meteorology

State of the Climate report, 2018

bom.gov.au

Breakthrough National Association for Climate Restoration

*Climate Emergency Defined,
2019*

[breakthroughonline.org.au/
publications](http://breakthroughonline.org.au/publications)

Global climate change impacts

The Climate Council

*The Good, The Bad and the Ugly:
Limiting Temperature Rise to
1.5°C, 2018*

climatecouncil.org.au

Breakthrough National Association for Climate Restoration

- *What Lies Beneath, 2018*
- *Antarctic Tipping Points, 2017*

[breakthroughonline.org.au/
publications](http://breakthroughonline.org.au/publications)

UNESCO, World Heritage Centre

*Impacts of Climate Change on
World Heritage Coral Reefs: A
First Global Scientific
Assessment, 2017*

Global social, economic and political implications

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations

Climate Change and Your Food: Ten Facts

fao.org

Mercy Corps

Quick Facts: How Climate Change Affects People Living in Poverty, 2019

mercycorps.org

United Nations Human Rights (Office of the High Commissioner)

Climate Change and Poverty, 2019

ohchr.org

New Scientist

Eight Low-Lying Pacific Islands Swallowed Whole by Rising Seas, 2017

newscientist.com

World Economic Forum

These are the Top Risks Facing The World in 2020

weforum.org



The impacts of the climate emergency in Australia

Global heating as a consequence of significant greenhouse gas pollution from coal, oil and gas burning and deforestation is directly affecting Australians.

In the 2019/2020 summer, more than 12 million hectares have been burnt. Towns were destroyed. Communities were without water, shelter, power and food. People have died.

More than one billion animal lives were lost in bushfires across eastern Australia.⁵ And major cities were choked with smoke, posing health risks to many in our community. These catastrophic conditions, at least in part, were fuelled by climate change.⁶

Thirteen of the fourteen hottest years on record have been recorded this century. In the summer of 2018/2019 record summer temperatures were recorded in 87 locations across Australia.⁷

Heatwaves are one of the most serious climate-related risks for Australians, with the link between climate change and more extreme heatwaves very clear. Heatwaves are lasting longer, reaching higher maximum temperatures and are occurring more frequently over many regions of Australia.⁸

Over the same period, rainfall has significantly declined in the southeast and southwest corners of mainland Australia, while unprecedented flooding has occurred in northern Australia.

Record lowest summer rainfall occurred in 96 locations across Australia in 2018/2019, and over the same period, record highest summer rainfall occurred in 15 locations.⁹ Long-term heating and this reduction in rainfall is exacerbating and prolonging drought conditions.

The social and economic impacts of these extreme weather events are significant. In 2018, Australia insurance companies paid out \$1.2 billion following extreme weather events. And as of early January 2020, bushfires this summer had resulted in more than 8,500 insurance claims, totalling \$700 million.

There is little doubt that climate and environmental risks have evolved rapidly in recent years to present a foreseeable and material risk to corporations in many sectors of the Australian economy.¹⁰

These extreme weather events also have the capacity to disrupt Australia's food supply chain. Frequent and intense droughts, fires and changing weather patterns feasibly result in compromised crop yields and quality, and increased food prices. This in turn increases food insecurity for the most vulnerable in our community.

Australia's plants and animals are at extreme risk due to the speed and scale of the climate changing, the consequent extreme weather events, as well as land clearing and habitat loss.

Devastation to the natural environment is exacerbated by the inability of many species to adapt at the same pace as climatic change and the risk of pests and disease.

In 2016, the Bramble Cays Melomys became the first Australia mammal to become extinct due to storm surges and rising sea levels resulting from climate change.¹¹

⁵ [sydney.edu.au/news](https://www.sydney.edu.au/news)

⁶ Climate Council, 2019, *Full Statement from Australian Mayors*, climatecouncil.org.au

⁷ The Climate Council, 2019, *Dangerous Summer: Escalating Bushfire, Heat and Drought Risk*, climatecouncil.org.au

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Sarah Barker, 2018, *Directors' Liability and Climate Risk: Australia – Country Paper*, smithschool.ox.ac.uk

¹¹ [abc.net.au](https://www.abc.net.au)

Further Reading

Climate change impacts in Australia

The Climate Council

- *Dangerous Summer: Escalating Bushfire, Heat And Drought Risk*, 2019
- *This is What Climate Change Looks Like*, 2019
- *This is not Normal: Climate Change and Escalating Bushfire Risk*, 2019
- *Feeding a Hungry Nation: Climate Change, Food and Farming in Australia*, 2015
- *Compound Costs: How Climate Change is Damaging Australia's Economy*, 2019

climatecouncil.org.au

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)

Climate Change: Science and Solutions for Australia

csiro.au

Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC)

- *How Climate Change has Impacted Your Life*
- *A Pocket Guide to Climate Change*

abc.net.au

The impacts of the climate emergency in Yarra

We are feeling the impacts of the climate emergency in Yarra.

We have seen an increase in the frequency of extreme heat events, with 2019 being the hottest ever year on record. Between 1981 and 2010, we experienced an average of 8 days per year with temperatures exceeding 35°C.

By the 2050's, with increased emissions and heating this is expected to rise to between 13 and 21 days per year.¹²

Correspondingly, it is estimated that by the 2050's, the number of days where there is a high fire risk in Melbourne will increase by 42%.¹³ The impact of extreme weather events is exacerbated by Yarra's high to medium density neighbourhoods which elevate urban heat. This in turn has the increasing potential to negatively impact vulnerable members of the community.

A hotter climate is expected to bring more heavy rainfall events, which will increase the potential

for infrastructure, waterway and property damage and associated mental and physical health risks.

Future rainfall is difficult to predict. On average rainfall in Melbourne has declined by 100-200mm per year with the 1°C of global heating already experienced.

It is likely that as the planet continues to heat and our population grows, Melbourne's water resources will be placed under increased pressure, with greater incidence of drought and water shortages. Ensuring a continuous and secure water supply will no doubt be a significant challenge in the future.

These climate risk trends will significantly impact our natural environment, ecosystems, the built environment, and importantly, the health and wellbeing of our community.

¹² DELWP, 2019, *Greater Melbourne Climate Prediction*, climatechange.vic.gov.au

¹³ Ibid

Further Reading

Climate change impacts in Melbourne (including Yarra)

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)

- *Greater Melbourne Climate Predictions, 2019*
- Department of Environment/ Bureau of Meteorology *Climate Change in Australia, 2019*

climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au



Yarra Council's response to the climate emergency

Yarra Council recognises that the climate emergency presents an unprecedented challenge – both globally and locally. Our planet's climate is already too hot, with dangerous bushfires, heatwaves, droughts, storms and flooding becoming more intense and destructive.

The impacts of the climate emergency are being felt now and will dramatically worsen if we do not act with emergency speed and scale.

Transformational change is needed across our society and economy to rapidly reduce carbon emissions and draw-down (remove) excess emissions from the atmosphere so that we can help restore a safe climate.

The magnitude of the climate emergency means that incremental change or a business-as-usual response is not adequate.

Yarra Council endorsed its first *Climate Emergency Plan* that sets out our priorities and proposed actions for the next four years.

We're accelerating our own carbon emission reductions, supporting our community to act on the climate emergency, as well as to live with worsening climate impacts.

We are also investing in created a climate adapted city — across our green spaces, streets, and hard assets and infrastructure.

Highlights from our plan include:

- ‘Get off gas’ by transitioning all of Council’s buildings to electric, powered by 100% renewable energy, by 2030
- Transition all Council’s fleet to electric vehicles powered by renewable energy by 2025
- Speed up the roll out of cycling infrastructure by trialling temporary bike lanes to inform permanent upgrades
- Create climate adapted green spaces by harvesting more stormwater to irrigate our parks
- Introduce zero carbon standards for new commercial and residential developments, working with other government partners to amend the planning scheme
- Enable our community to cut their carbon emissions and collectively push for the urgent climate action we need
- Help residents and businesses take up renewable energy and facilitate solar installations
- Advocate for urgent climate action by other levels of government, including strong renewable energy and carbon emissions reduction targets, along with policy and economic measures that both enable recovery from the pandemic and drive emissions reductions.

Working together to create change

“Sometimes we just simply have to find a way. The moment we decide to fulfil something, we can do anything. And I’m sure that the moment we start behaving as if we were in an emergency, we can avoid climate and ecological catastrophe. Humans are very adaptable: we can still fix this. But the opportunity to do so will not last for long. We must start today. We have no more excuses.”

Greta Thunberg, Climate Activist.

Responding effectively to the climate emergency requires sustained, collective and large-scale action across all levels of government, businesses and the community. The good news is that many of the solutions to the climate emergency already exist globally. But we must support and accelerate them if we are to create a healthy and sustainable future for all.

We know that our community wants climate action. The 2019 Australia Talks National Survey which surveyed more than 54,000 Australians about their hopes, concerns and futures found that climate change was the leading worry for Australians across all demographics, with 72% of respondents saying that it would affect their lives.¹⁴

Similarly, the 2019 Australia Institute’s Climate of the Nation Survey found that 81% of Australians are concerned that climate change will result in more droughts and floods, with 64% agreeing that Australia should have a national target of net zero emissions by 2050.¹⁵

The time to act is now. We must build civic leadership and support this momentum for change.

Taking the first step is critical but sometimes it is difficult to know what to do. There are actions we can take as individuals and as part of our neighbourhoods, families, workplaces, friendship circles and community networks to effect change.

Some of the things we can do include:

- Get up to speed with climate science and the impact of climate change on our natural environment and communities – and then share this information with family, friends, neighbours and colleagues.
- Get politically active – join a climate strike, write to or request to meet with Members of Parliament to demand stronger climate policy and action.
- Join a local climate action group like Yarra Climate Action Now; encourage your family, friends, neighbours and colleagues to join too!
- Get involved in local climate action and advocacy campaigns like those being led by Australian Conservation Foundation, Environment Victoria or Groundswell Giving.
- Reduce your carbon emissions at home – there are lots of ways to do this including buying 100% renewable energy, embracing a plant-based diet and divesting your bank and superannuation funds from fossil fuels.
- Take local on-ground action with your community. Share knowledge, skills and resources, such as through communal food growing and composting, sharing surplus food and goods, encouraging friends and neighbours to switch to renewable energy. Community groups can apply for grants for community-led projects. Visit yarracity.vic.gov.au/communitygrants
- Join Council training, activities and events which focus on building community skills for climate action and low emission lifestyle choices. Subscribe to Yarra Environment News to find out more about these opportunities at yarracity.vic.gov.au/sustainability

¹⁴ australiatalks.abc.net.au

¹⁵ tai.org.au

Getting up to speed with climate science

There are many sources from which you can draw credible climate science information and information about the impacts of the climate emergency. Some of these include the Climate Council, an independent, not-for-profit climate change communications organisation; the Bureau of Meteorology; and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). See the Further Reading sections in this document.

Climate conversations and sharing climate change information

Conversations are the most common way people access and process information. When you talk to someone who you trust (and who trusts you) about the climate emergency and its impacts, you both have the opportunity to process complex and confronting information, as well as feelings of anxiety and despair. It also gives you an opportunity to talk about potential responses and collective action.

Suggestions for an effective conversation about the climate emergency

Tell stories that focus on why you care about climate change

How does climate change make you feel? Build empathy by telling the story of your understandings and feelings. Emphasise common needs and values (for example, the need for safety or the future of our children).

Provide your understanding of the significant threat of climate change¹⁶

Talk about the impacts we see around us and what the science says. Ask people to reflect on the changes they are experiencing or have read about.

¹⁶ tai.org.au

¹⁷ climatecouncil.org.au

Talk about the action you are taking in response to the climate emergency

Talk about what you've been doing, for example, the conversations you are having now about climate change. Give people information about how they could also take these actions. You could also share the five simple ways you can tackle climate change daily.¹⁷

Listen to the other person

Reflect back on what you hear, and pay attention to body language. Body language can tell you if a person is uncomfortable and defensive, or open to the conversation.¹⁸

Ask challenging questions

Questions can encourage people you are talking with to think deeply about the topic.

Talk about the technical solutions we have

Science and research has identified the technical solutions needed to transition to a zero emissions economy and beyond. For example, detailed plans show how we can get to 100% renewable energy, and transform our transport, industrial and agricultural systems.¹⁹ Conversations, advocacy and other actions will help build the political will for change.

A reminder: Sometimes conversations about climate change can become tense, uncomfortable or emotional for you or the person that you are speaking to. For some people, talking about the climate emergency may be too difficult or frightening. In such situations, take a breath and focus on listening to and empathising with the person you are talking with.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Jane Morton, 2016. *Don't mention the emergency: making the case for emergency climate action.* climateemergencydeclaration.org

Further Reading

How to have climate conversations with neighbours, family, friends and colleagues

Climate for Change

Host a Facilitated Conversation
climateforchange.org.au/host

Australian Conservation Foundation

A guide to telling compelling stories that move people to action

acf.org.au

Breakthrough National Association for Climate Restoration

How to Communicate a Climate Emergency

breakthroughonline.org.au/guides

Psychology for a Safe Climate

A guide to better conversations about the climate emergency

psychologyforasafeclimate.org/publications

Communicating the climate emergency

Rebecca Huntley, University of Melbourne

Renewing democracy in a time of environmental crisis

sustainable.unimelb.edu.au

Adrian Bardon, Wake Forest University

Humans are hardwired to dismiss facts that don't fit their worldview

theconversation.com

Oxfam New Zealand

How to talk about Climate Change

oxfam.org.nz

Ramp up your climate advocacy

There is a need for all levels of government to deliver urgent, effective and meaningful climate policies and action.

Sign the climate emergency petition

Climate emergency petitions have been gathering momentum. The petitions call on all levels of government to declare a climate emergency and initiate a whole-of-community response to the crisis, cedamia.org

Support existing climate action and campaigns

There are lots of environmental organisations and community groups taking action in response to the climate emergency. Here are some of the ones we know about. No doubt there are plenty more!

Contact your state and federal member of parliament

It is the job of our members of parliament to represent us. This means that you can call, write to or visit them to discuss your concerns about the climate emergency and ask them to advocate for stronger action.

Ask them to push for a fast transition to 100% renewable energy, rule out all new fossil fuel developments, end deforestation, and shift to regenerative agriculture and sustainable transport.

For more information including guides on writing, calling or visiting your member of parliament, visit climateforchange.org.au

For federal members of parliament contact details, visit electorate.aec.gov.au and for state members of parliament contact details, visit parliament.vic.gov.au/electorates

Vote for urgent, effective and meaningful climate policies and action

To see urgent, effective and meaningful climate policies and action, people need to vote for this at local, state and federal government elections.

Join a climate action group

There are many local groups such as Yarra Climate Action Now (YCAN) that are fighting for strong climate action.

Get out on the street

Make your voice heard on the issues you care about. The more people who turn up to rallies and demand strong climate action, the closer we are to making that change happen. Keep an eye out for *Schools Strike 4 Climate* and other climate action rallies.

Use social media to influence

Through social media you can keep up to date with climate action and advocacy happening locally and beyond. It is also a great way to connect with like-minded people, amplify and share stories about the impacts of the climate emergency, and organise and encourage climate action.

Existing climate action and campaigns

Australian Conservation Foundation

A non-partisan environmental organisation with campaigns focussing on climate change, habitat destruction and other issues.

acf.org.au

Environment Victoria

A non-partisan environmental organisation with campaigns focussing on climate change and the protection of nature.

environmentvictoria.org.au

Groundswell Giving

Australia's first giving circle created to fund high impact climate advocacy.

groundswellgiving.org

Yarra Climate Action Now

A local Yarra group focussed on climate action and advocacy.

ycan.org.au

Inner Northern Parents for Climate Action

A group who live in Melbourne's inner north, and are committed to taking action.

Email innernorthmelbparentsclimate@gmail.com

Reducing your carbon emissions at home

There are choices you can make which lessen your carbon emissions and personal impact on the climate emergency.

Find out more online at yarracity.vic.gov.au/climateaction

Go solar and save energy

The Yarra Energy Foundation (YEF), funded by Yarra City Council, are local, independent energy experts. Contact YEF for solar advice and other practical steps to improve the energy efficiency of your home and business.

www.yef.org.au

Buy 100% renewable energy

Greenpeace and the Total Energy Centre have a Green Electricity Guide to assist people source renewable and carbon neutral energy.

greenelectricityguide.org.au

Embrace a plant-rich diet

There are many sources of information about how to embrace a plant rich-diet but this article makes the case for why.

theconversation.com

Divesting your bank and superannuation funds from fossil fuels

Market Forces compares the fossil fuel investment positions of banks and superannuation funds to help you choose how to shift your funds to fossil-fuel free institutions.

marketforces.org.au

Together we can create change.

To find out more or express your interest contact us at climateemergency@yarracity.vic.gov.au

Customer service centres

Bargoonga Nganjin, North Fitzroy Library

182 St Georges Road, Fitzroy North

Collingwood Town Hall 140 Hoddle Street, Abbotsford

Connie Benn Centre 160 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy

Richmond Town Hall 333 Bridge Road, Richmond

Yarra City Council

PO Box 168 Richmond VIC 3121

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