

Taking Climate Action for the Reef

IMPACTFUL CLIMATE ACTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES



Many of us care deeply about the Great Barrier Reef, but identifying actions to take on climate change can seem overwhelming. To make it easier, we've gathered insights from experts to help identify which actions to focus on when encouraging individuals and communities to protect the Great Barrier Reef from the effects of climate change.

Recognising the need for urgent and significant climate action at many scales, there are two key factors that can help guide where we target individual and community actions - impact and adoptability. We need to focus efforts on actions that can both make a difference and can be adopted by many people.

Choosing actions for impact

Climate change is the most significant threat to the Great Barrier Reef. In addition to action to reduce stressors like coastal development and land-based run-off, we need urgent climate action. This requires reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on fossil fuels (called decarbonisation). In this sense, we can think of high impact actions as those that actively aim to make the biggest contribution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Climate action requires action across many scales - local to global. Research has shown household actions can help us meet up to 10-30% of emissions reductions goals [1].



High impact actions we can do around the home

- Install solar panels
- Limit car use (or go electric)
- Switch to a renewable energy plan
- Eat a more plant-based diet
- Plan to avoid at least one international flight
- Reduce food waste

Each of these activities will save at least 800 kgs in CO2 emissions per year [3]. That is like planting around 13 trees and letting them grow for 10 years to absorb the same amount of CO2.



Check out [PROJECT DRAWDOWN](#) for more information on impactful actions



Actions with different levels of impact and adoptability



Higher impact, lower adoptability = Give up car use
Limiting car use can save up to 1.2t in CO2 emissions per year, but for many, completely giving up car use is unlikely.



Lower impact, higher adoptability = Turning off the lights
Turning off the lights is a highly adoptable action that conserves energy, but its overall impact on reducing CO2 emissions is relatively low.



Higher adoptability, higher impact = Switch to renewables
Switching to a renewable energy provider is available to many people and is high impact, as it significantly cuts CO2 emissions and supports clean energy.

Adjusting actions to increase adoptability

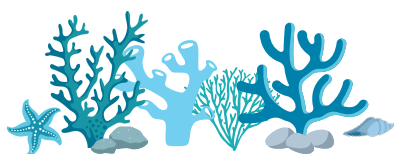
To increase adoptability, we can also adjust actions so they're more accessible. For example, while going fully plant-based might be too hard for some, encouraging people to start by adding just one extra plant-based meal each week can be a more manageable first step. This can still make a difference - switching just one meat-based meal to a plant-based one each week can reduce an individual's carbon emissions by up to 40kg of CO2 annually [4].

Choosing actions for adoptability

Even the most effective climate actions won't make a difference if people aren't willing or able to do them. Along with impact, it's important to think about how likely an action is to be put into practice. This depends on factors like location, lifestyle, and other potential benefits, such as improved health or cost savings. For example, young families in regional areas might find it hard to reduce car use but could be open to eating more plant-based meals. Sometimes, a less impactful action with higher adoptability can have a greater overall benefit because more people can take part.

What about recycling and keep cups?

These are great steps toward reducing waste and supporting climate efforts. However, many people overestimate the impact of these actions on reducing emissions [3], and a large number of people are already doing them. To tackle climate change, we need to shift our focus toward promoting actions that have a greater impact. While it's important to acknowledge all positive efforts, prioritising and promoting higher-impact actions—especially those that are less well-known and have more room for adoption—can make a bigger difference.



Thinking about other types of impact

When considering the impact of climate actions, we can also look beyond direct impacts on reducing emissions and acknowledge the potential for indirect influence. For example, engaging in social actions, such as talking to friends, family and colleagues, can help to shift public opinion and social norms needed to drive collective behavioural change. In addition, advocating for systemic change - such as supporting policies, engaging in community initiatives, or influencing corporate practices - can enhance our impact by influencing larger systems and structures. While they may not result in immediate emissions reductions, these actions create ripples that contribute to more significant and widespread changes for healthy coral reefs and communities.



High impact actions we can do to influence others

- Discuss climate action with your family and friends to make it a common and natural conversation topic.
- Organise or join community events to bring people together and start important conversations about climate change.



High impact actions we can do to influence the system

- Join or support a climate advocacy group that is working towards changing policy and legislation.
- Write a letter, email or make a phone call to your local politicians to tell them you are concerned about climate impacts on the Reef and want to see more action.
- Make your money count by ensuring your investments, like superannuation, support clean energy.

Remember - not everyone can take all actions and not all actions are for everyone, but there is at least one action for everyone!

Thinking about things that affect adoptability

Thinking about adoptability means thinking about how easily people can integrate these actions into their lives. This often involves thinking about the place and context in which the action will be taken, understanding your audience's specific needs and values, and identifying and addressing potential barriers - such as financial constraints, lack of access to resources, or societal norms. Here are some key questions to help consider whether the action is likely to be adopted:

- 1 What are the specific needs and priorities of the target audience?
- 2 What existing resources and infrastructure support or hinder this action?
- 3 What financial or logistical barriers might individuals or communities face?
- 4 How can the action be integrated into daily routines or existing practices?
- 5 What societal or cultural norms influence the acceptance of this action?



You can also think about whether the action will bring joy by doing a [CLIMATE VENN](#) activity.

References

- [1] Hertwich & Peters (2009). Carbon footprint of nations: a global, trade-linked analysis. *Environ Sci Technol*. 2009 Aug 15;43(16):6414-20.
- [2] Dubois et al. (2019). It starts at home? Climate policies targeting household consumption and behavioural decisions are key to low-carbon futures. *Energy Research and Social Science*, 52: 144-158.
- [3] Australian Ethical (2023). [A little goes a long way: Examining effective ways to lower your carbon footprint.](#)
- [4] Paul & Nerneck, (2018). Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers. *Science*, 360 (6392): 987-992

Additional resources

- [Our World in Data - Greenhouse Gas Emissions](#)
- [Climate Action Australia - What Can I Do Myself?](#)
- [Count Us In | High Impact Climate Actions](#)
- [The Climate Council - Conversation Guides](#)
- [Carbon Footprint Calculator | Carbon Positive Australia](#)
- [The Carbon Calculator - Measure Your Business Footprint](#)
- [Seven Summers Climate Action Plan](#)



For more resources check out our [Community Reef Protection Toolkit](#)



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