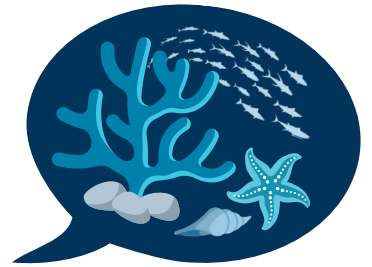


# Inspiring Action for the Great Barrier Reef: Messages that Motivate Climate Change Efforts

Climate change is the greatest threat to the future of the Great Barrier Reef. As such, we need to find ways to help people understand the issues and solutions to drive action. Yet, motivating behaviour change is tricky! Fortunately, social science offers guidance on crafting messages that strengthen our approach. This factsheet presents a series of evidence-backed messages that are more likely to motivate individuals and communities to take meaningful climate action for the Great Barrier Reef.




## Messages to inspire action

Crafting effective messages is a bit like baking a cake. Just like a cake requires the right blend of ingredients to rise and taste delicious, effective messaging needs a mix of elements to resonate and inspire action. Of course, there is no magic message and messages will be different depending on the audience and context, but there are a few core ingredients. For example, research suggests that to have an effective climate conversation in the context of the Reef you need a dash of wonder, a sprinkle of grief, and a collective call to action. And just like any cake, the more personal you make it, the better it will be received.

- 1 Highlight the value of the Reef and why its special/important (WONDER)
- 2 State that the Reef is under threat due to climate change (GRIEF)
- 3 Include a call to action and how people can take it, not just why (ACTION - what & how)
- 4 Use motivational and collective language (COLLECTIVE)



 Download our Writing Messages for Climate Action [TEMPLATE](#)

## Messages about the Reef

### WONDER

The Great Barrier Reef is a natural wonder. It is home to hundreds and thousands of species such as the Green Sea Turtle, the Spotted Eagle Ray, and the famous Clownfish. It is a vibrant and incredible ecosystem and one that is part of who we are.

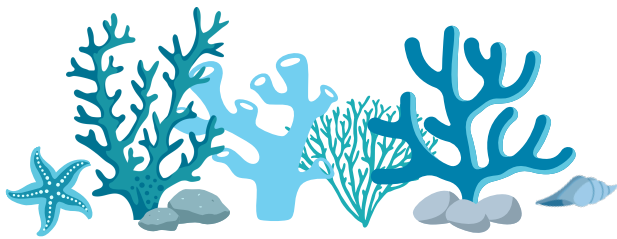


- This is the entry point into the conversation where people are “hooked in”. It is what makes these conversations different to other conversations about climate change.
- People need to connect with the Reef as an icon. That is the “magic” and “wonder” of the Reef, and what it represents locally, nationally, and globally.
- The more you can relate this part of the message to your local context or personal experiences the better (e.g. “My favourite is...”, “This [species] is special to this area here...”, “Just last week...[memorable moment or magical experience]”. “The Reef is important to me/us because...”).
- This part also serves as a reminder of what we can still save. No point trying to motivate people to save it if they can’t understand and connect with what is on the line!

## Messages about threats

### GRIEF

The Reef is under threat from climate change. Rapid increases in greenhouse gas emissions stemming from fossil fuel use are causing sea temperatures to rise. This can lead to coral bleaching events. If these events happen too often, it can make it difficult for the Reef to recover. This is what we are worried about.



- Don't shy away from recognising climate as a threat. It doesn't turn people off etc. but don't focus too much on explaining the threat (e.g. the process of bleaching).
- Most people are aware and concerned about the impacts of climate change on the Reef. People want to know about action.
- Important to connect the dots if you can (burning fossil fuels, emissions, climate, heatwaves, bleaching etc.), this helps people understand how the actions work later.
- If you have personal experiences of climate impacts, include them (e.g. how coral bleaching events make you feel).
- People need to feel some level of sadness or worry about the future of the Reef, so it is important to include some of the reality of the loss we are facing.
- It's okay to talk about threats, as long as you follow up with a solution.

## Messages about action (what it is)

### ACTION

Some examples of impactful actions to combat the climate change:

- Divest from fossil fuels/invest in renewables
- Eat more plant-rich diets
- Join or donate to a climate advocacy group
- Commit to more carbon-conscious travel plans
- Start a climate conversation in the workplace
- Tell decision-makers you want more ambitious climate policies by using your voice and your vote

- The hardest and most important part! The call to action should be one that you would like to personally champion. It has to be really specific.
- Also, in this case less is more. Try and stick to a single call to action (or no more than 3 if you feel more comfortable with multiple).
- Looking for more insights on which actions to share? Check out options such as: [www.drawdown.org](http://www.drawdown.org) and [www.count-us-in.com](http://www.count-us-in.com).
- Important to avoid broad policy statements such as "To protect the Reef, we need to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees" without specifically including how people can help contribute to this goal (e.g. you can use your voice by writing to MPs and tell them you support taking action in line with scientific consensus).

## Messages about action (how it is)

### ACTION

E.g. Invest in renewables

We can invest in the future of the Reef by making sure our money is being invested in solutions like renewable energy. For example, you can check sites like Market Forces to see if your bank or superfund uses money as a force for good (or not). Where you invest your money matters for our Reef!

- People need to understand how they can take the action and how the action will have an impact.
- This is called procedural knowledge, an important ingredient for empowering people to act.
- Many people find it difficult to see how they can influence something as big as increased ocean temperatures. Just like we help connect the dots between climate change and bleaching, we also have to connect the dots between individual action and impacting the bigger picture.

## Messages about collective efficacy

### COLLECTIVE EFFICACY

Together we can protect the Reef by using our voices to support the transition to renewable energy.

Our collective voice is loud.

We can all work together to ensure a thriving reef into the future.

- People need to feel like we are all in this together and that collectively our actions will make a difference.
- It is important to emphasise the collective and use motivational language (e.g. WE can SUPPORT) instead of focusing on personal and restrictive language (e.g. YOU can REDUCE).

### Tailoring to your audience

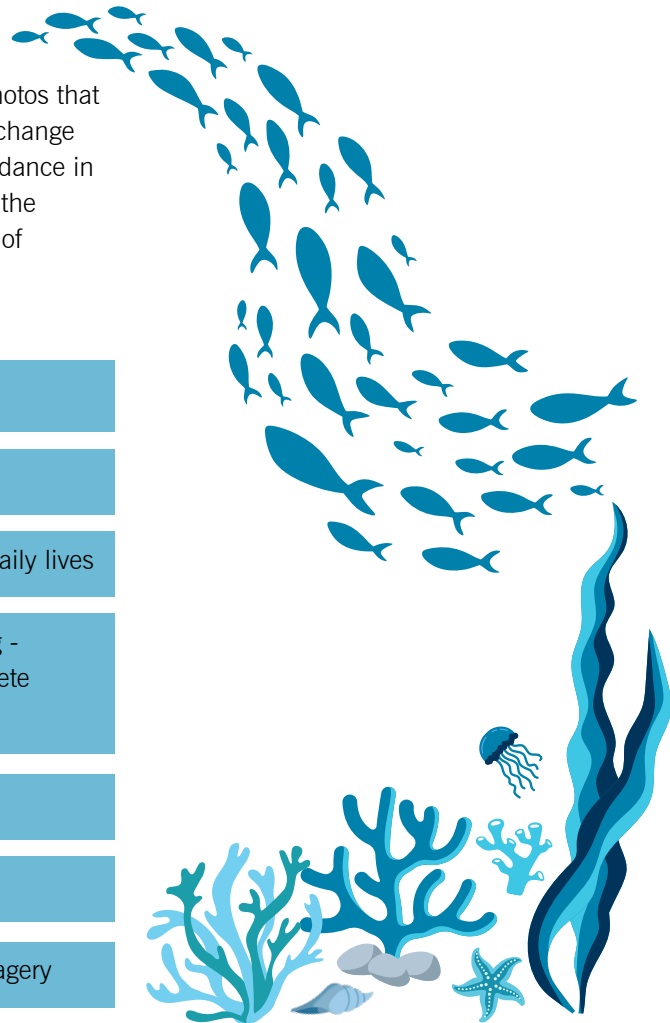


While these are some general, high-level messages suitable for a broad audience, best practice is to tailor them to your specific audience and context. This **TEMPLATE** can assist you in framing your messages to resonate with your audience's unique values and motivations, as well as the desired action.

### Using photos

When writing messages for climate action, careful consideration of the photos that you use is crucial as visuals can evoke powerful emotions and can even change the way the written text is processed. Scientific insights offer valuable guidance in selecting images that effectively engage the target audience and increase the likelihood that your message is having the desired effect. Based on years of international social research and evidence, the Climate Visuals group has developed a set of [core principles for climate change communication](#).

- 1 Show real people not staged photos
- 2 Tell 'new' stories not familiar or 'classic' climate change imagery
- 3 Show images that link climate change and your target audience's daily lives
- 4 Climate impacts are emotionally powerful but can be overwhelming - to overcome be sure to link images of climate impacts with a concrete behavioural action for people to take
- 5 Choose images that speak to the audience's values and drivers
- 6 Show local (but serious) climate impacts
- 7 Avoid using images that could alienate viewers, such as protest imagery



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

*The content in this factsheet is based on the doctoral research of Dr Yolanda Waters.*



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