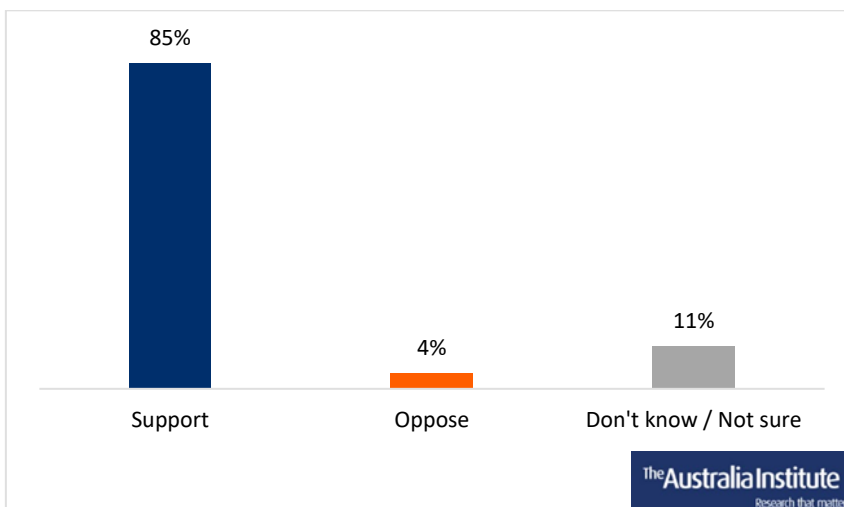


Bush Firefighter Reserves?

Key points

- Climate change will increase dangerous bushfire conditions in coming years, placing pressure on Australia’s predominantly volunteer bush firefighting force
- National reviews of Australia’s bushfire and disaster preparedness highlight the need to reduce reliance on the Australian Defence Force during natural disasters, and improve capability and resilience of volunteer firefighting efforts
- An overwhelming majority of Australians (85%) support a model similar to the Army Reserve for volunteer firefighters, that could provide additional benefits including medical support, tax incentives, and financial compensation
- Australians also support improving conditions and incentives for volunteer firefighters (88%), and increasing funding for firefighting equipment (90%)

Figure 1: Support for the Army Reserves model for bush firefighters



The Bureau of Meteorology ‘High Risk Weather Season Outlook’ expects heightened bushfire risk for the 2023-24 season.ⁱ The 2021 *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements* (Recommendations 6.157, 6.158, 6.159) the *Australian Bushfire & Climate Plan* (Recommendations 48, 54, 111) both emphasise the need to better support volunteer fire fighters, to improve bushfire capability and resilience.ⁱⁱ

Among suggestions for reforming volunteer firefighter support, to improve bushfire fighting capabilities in increasingly-challenging seasons, has been the idea of implementing a model similar to the ADF Reserves.ⁱⁱⁱ

This model has overwhelming support (85%) among Australians, and across all voters (87% of Labor voters, 86% of Coalition voters and 85% of Greens voters, 76% of One Nation voters, and 81% of Independent/Other voters).

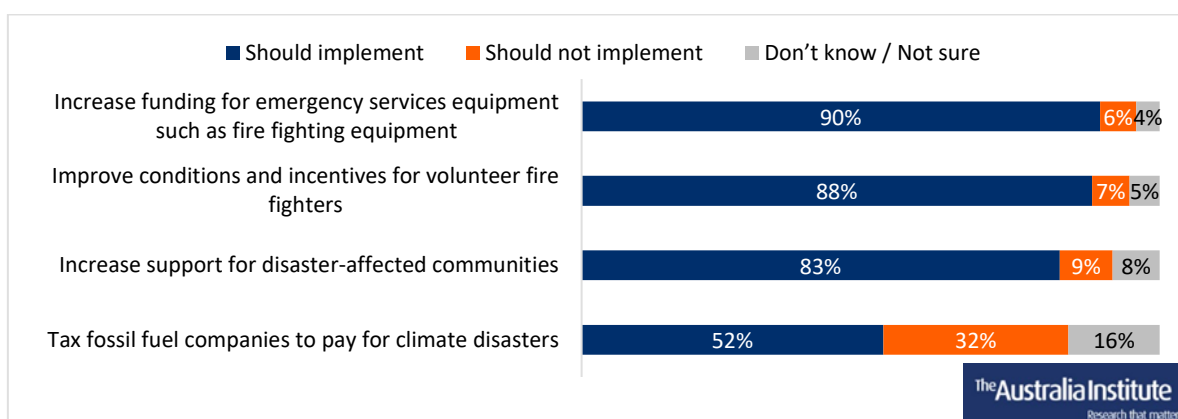
ADF Reserves receive many more benefits and supports than emergency services volunteers, including payment, tax incentives, medical and mental health support, employee protections and employer support (Table 1).

Table 1: Conditions, ADF Reserve and volunteer firefighters (details in appendix)

Conditions	ADF Reserve ^{iv}	NSW RFS ^v	ACT RFS ^{vi}	Vic. CFA ^{vii}	QLD RFS ^{viii}	SA CFS ^{ix}	NT F&RS ^x	Tas. TFS ^{xi}	WA BFS ^{xii}
Mental health support	Yes	Some	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some	No
Employee protections	Yes	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some
Employer support	Yes	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some
Medical support	Yes	No	Some	No	No	No	No	No	No
Tax incentives	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Financial Compensation	Yes	No	No	No	Some	No	No	No	No

An overwhelming majority of Australians also support implementation of broad suite of policies to support volunteer firefighting efforts, including 90% of Australians supporting an increase to funding for volunteer firefighting equipment (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Opinion on implementation of bushfire policies



This aligns with recommendations from the Royal Commission (6.160, 8.103), and Emergency Leaders for Climate Action (55b), to increase funding for necessary equipment – especially personal protective equipment, crew protection in vehicles, and the sovereign aerial firefighting capability.

A majority of Australians (52%) also support a tax on fossil fuel companies to pay for climate disasters.

Appendix

ADF Reserve and volunteer firefighter conditions

ADF Reserve	
Financial Compensation for time away from work	Yes - ADF Reservists are paid for their service. Daily rates vary between \$179 (warehouse worker) and \$762 per day (surgeon).
Tax incentives	Yes - pay received for ADF Reserve work is tax-free (unless working full-time for the ADF).
Medical support	Yes - \$600 payment each year to assist with health costs. Some Service Categories receive up to \$2,500 to assist with private healthcare costs.
Mental health support	Yes - the Reserve Assistance Program provides free counselling services, 24 hours a day.
Employee protections	Yes - the Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act 2001 makes it an offence for an employer to discriminate against, disadvantage, hinder, prevent, or dismiss an employee or prospective employee for rendering Defence service (including training).
Employer support	Yes - the Employer Support Payment Scheme provides financial assistance to employers of Reserve members and self-employed Reserve members, when the Reserve member is away from work for long periods.

NSW RFS	
Mental health support	Yes – “Critical Incident Support Services (CISS) and Peer Support Services are available to all members of the NSW RFS who may be experiencing traumatic or every day stressful reaction.” ^{xiii}
Employee protections	Some - protection from dismissal under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> for “voluntary emergency management activities.”
Employer support	Some - Employers who pay workers while on leave for firefighting are exempt from paying payroll tax on those wages.
Medical support	No
Tax incentives	No
Financial Compensation	No

ACT RFS	
Mental health support	Yes – Short term psychological care provided free of charge.
Employee protections	Some - protection from dismissal under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> for “voluntary emergency management activities.”
Employer support	Some - Employers who pay workers while on leave for firefighting are exempt from paying payroll tax on those wages.
Medical support	Some - \$100 fitness allowance per annum
Tax incentives	No
Financial Compensation	No

Victoria CFS	
Mental health support	Yes – “Professional, confidential counselling through an external provider for personal or CFA-related issues.” ^{xiv}
Employee protections	Some - protection from dismissal under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> for “voluntary emergency management activities.”
Employer support	Some - Employers who pay workers while on leave for firefighting are exempt from paying payroll tax on those wages.
Medical support	No
Tax incentives	No
Financial Compensation	No

QLD RFS	
Mental health support	Yes – “The Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN) provides access to a team of highly qualified Psychologists and Counsellors in addition to Peer Support Officers, available to QFES staff, volunteers with counselling services available to immediate family members, promoting and supporting positive mental health and well-being.” ^{xv}
Employee protections	Some - protection from dismissal under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> for “voluntary emergency management activities.”
Employer support	Some - Employers who pay workers while on leave for firefighting are exempt from paying payroll tax on those wages.
Medical support	No
Tax incentives	No
Financial Compensation	Some – Queensland Fire and Emergency Services employ ‘Auxiliary Firefighters’, also known as ‘retained’ firefighters. These casual employees supplement volunteer QLD RFS brigades.

SA CFS	
Mental health support	Some – Access to the Stress Prevention and Management (SPAM) Helpline. “The SPAM Helpline is an employee assistance program that provides a confidential access point for volunteers, employees and their families for counselling and referrals to mental health professionals.” ^{xvi}
Employee protections	Some - protection from dismissal under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> for “voluntary emergency management activities.”
Employer support	Some - Employers who pay workers while on leave for firefighting are exempt from paying payroll tax on those wages.
Medical support	No
Tax incentives	No
Financial Compensation	No

NT F&RS	
Mental health support	Yes – NT Police, Fire, and Emergency Services workers can access various supports, including Peer Support, Psychologists, and Counsellors. ^{xvii}
Employee protections	Some - protection from dismissal under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> for “voluntary emergency management activities.”
Employer support	Some - Employers who pay workers while on leave for firefighting are exempt from paying payroll tax on those wages.
Medical support	No
Tax incentives	No
Financial Compensation	No

NT F&RS	
Mental health support	Some – screening and coaching offered to support the mental health of volunteers. ^{xviii}
Employee protections	Some - protection from dismissal under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> for “voluntary emergency management activities.”
Employer support	Some - Employers who pay workers while on leave for firefighting are exempt from paying payroll tax on those wages. ^{xix}
Medical support	No
Tax incentives	No
Financial Compensation	No

WA BFS	
Mental health support	No – No services apparent.
Employee protections	Some - protection from dismissal under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> for “voluntary emergency management activities.”
Employer support	Some - Employers who pay workers while on leave for firefighting are exempt from paying payroll tax on those wages.
Medical support	No
Tax incentives	No
Financial Compensation	No

Polling Method

Between 3 and 9 October 2023, The Australia Institute surveyed 1002 adults living in Australia, online through Dynata’s panel, with nationally representative samples by gender, age group and state/territory. A further 472 South Australians and 126 Queenslanders were sampled to produce more precise results, but weighting was used to ensure that people from these states were not over-represented in national results.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the House of Representatives. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs.

The research is compliant with the [Australian Polling Council Quality Mark standards](#). The long methodology disclosure statement follows.

Long disclosure statement

The results were weighted by three variables (gender, age group and state or territory) based on Australian Bureau of Statistics [“National, state and territory population”](#) data, using the raking method. Those who answered the gender identity question as “Non-binary”, “I use a different term”, or “Prefer not to answer” had their responses included with females for the purpose of reporting, due to constraints from weighting data availability. This resulted in an effective sample size of 1,179.

The margin of error (95% confidence level) for the national results is $\pm 3\%$.

Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting intention questions appeared just after the initial demographic questions, before policy questions. Respondents who answered “Don’t know / Not sure” for voting intention were then asked a leaning question; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs. “Coalition” includes separate responses for Liberal and

National. “Other” refers to Independent/Other, and minor parties in cases where they were included in the voting intention but represent too small a sample to be reported separately in the crosstabs.



**Australian
Polling Council
Quality Mark**

Detailed results

No preceding questions in the poll are expected to have influenced the results of the questions published here.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

"Governments are doing enough to prepare for the upcoming bushfire season."

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	8%	12%	5%	10%	5%	5%	11%
Agree	29%	32%	27%	32%	26%	28%	34%
Disagree	29%	27%	31%	31%	29%	28%	26%
Strongly disagree	16%	15%	17%	14%	21%	18%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	17%	14%	20%	13%	20%	22%	19%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	8%	8%	10%	10%	3%	4%
Agree	29%	31%	34%	26%	25%	13%
Disagree	29%	30%	26%	32%	34%	33%
Strongly disagree	16%	13%	15%	21%	21%	21%
Don't know / Not sure	17%	19%	14%	11%	17%	30%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	8%	19%	10%	6%	3%	3%
Agree	29%	35%	33%	28%	23%	28%
Disagree	29%	29%	28%	30%	29%	30%
Strongly disagree	16%	11%	17%	13%	18%	20%
Don't know / Not sure	17%	7%	12%	23%	27%	19%

Which of the following policies do you think Australian state and federal governments should implement to better prepare for bushfires?

Improve conditions and incentives for volunteer fire fighters.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Should implement	88%	87%	90%	86%	89%	88%	89%
Should not implement	7%	8%	5%	9%	5%	7%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	5%	6%	5%	5%	6%	5%	5%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Should implement	88%	89%	87%	91%	88%	87%
Should not implement	7%	6%	7%	5%	8%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	5%	5%	6%	5%	4%	2%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Should implement	88%	88%	85%	85%	88%	93%
Should not implement	7%	9%	9%	8%	3%	4%
Don't know / Not sure	5%	3%	5%	7%	8%	4%

Increase funding for emergency services equipment such as fire fighting equipment.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Should implement	90%	86%	93%	87%	92%	92%	87%
Should not implement	6%	9%	4%	9%	5%	5%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	4%	5%	3%	4%	4%	3%	6%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Should implement	90%	92%	88%	88%	81%	95%
Should not implement	6%	4%	7%	12%	11%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	4%	4%	5%	1%	8%	2%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Should implement	90%	86%	85%	85%	93%	96%
Should not implement	6%	9%	11%	6%	4%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	4%	5%	4%	8%	3%	2%

Increase support for disaster-affected communities.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Should implement	83%	79%	86%	84%	83%	83%	78%
Should not implement	9%	12%	7%	8%	9%	8%	15%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	9%	7%	8%	8%	9%	7%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Should implement	83%	84%	81%	86%	77%	82%
Should not implement	9%	8%	10%	10%	9%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	7%	9%	4%	14%	10%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Should implement	83%	81%	84%	80%	84%	84%
Should not implement	9%	14%	12%	9%	6%	6%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	5%	5%	10%	10%	10%

Tax fossil fuel companies to pay for climate disasters.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Should implement	52%	50%	54%	54%	50%	44%	60%
Should not implement	32%	38%	27%	30%	34%	39%	25%
Don't know / Not sure	16%	12%	19%	16%	17%	16%	15%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Should implement	52%	60%	40%	79%	28%	40%
Should not implement	32%	25%	43%	14%	56%	34%
Don't know / Not sure	16%	15%	17%	7%	17%	26%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Should implement	52%	66%	60%	56%	46%	39%
Should not implement	32%	23%	31%	28%	31%	42%
Don't know / Not sure	16%	11%	9%	16%	23%	20%

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Mining and burning gas and coal makes bushfires worse.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	17%	17%	17%	19%	17%	14%	13%
Agree	28%	28%	28%	29%	29%	22%	33%
Disagree	25%	26%	23%	22%	25%	30%	23%
Strongly disagree	12%	16%	8%	13%	8%	16%	9%
Don't know / Not sure	18%	13%	24%	17%	21%	18%	22%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	17%	18%	8%	43%	7%	16%
Agree	28%	35%	24%	32%	18%	17%
Disagree	25%	21%	33%	14%	30%	26%
Strongly disagree	12%	6%	19%	3%	28%	9%
Don't know / Not sure	18%	21%	17%	8%	18%	32%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	17%	25%	23%	14%	16%	10%
Agree	28%	45%	33%	26%	22%	18%
Disagree	25%	18%	21%	22%	26%	32%
Strongly disagree	12%	3%	9%	10%	8%	22%
Don't know / Not sure	18%	9%	14%	28%	28%	17%

Lack of preparation by governments will make the impacts of this bushfire season worse.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	36%	33%	38%	36%	36%	35%	30%
Agree	46%	48%	45%	45%	45%	46%	53%
Disagree	8%	9%	6%	7%	9%	10%	6%
Strongly disagree	2%	3%	2%	2%	4%	3%	1%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	6%	9%	9%	7%	7%	10%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	36%	35%	33%	47%	25%	37%
Agree	46%	46%	49%	42%	48%	41%
Disagree	8%	10%	7%	4%	7%	8%
Strongly disagree	2%	2%	3%	2%	4%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	7%	7%	4%	16%	11%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	36%	41%	35%	35%	36%	33%
Agree	46%	44%	48%	46%	45%	47%
Disagree	8%	8%	7%	7%	7%	9%
Strongly disagree	2%	5%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	8%	3%	8%	11%	10%	8%

Dealing with the impacts of climate change is more expensive than taking climate action.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	28%	27%	28%	28%	25%	25%	31%
Agree	34%	34%	35%	33%	37%	33%	34%
Disagree	15%	16%	14%	14%	18%	15%	12%
Strongly disagree	8%	9%	8%	10%	6%	9%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	15%	14%	15%	15%	14%	18%	14%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	28%	32%	18%	50%	11%	21%
Agree	34%	36%	40%	25%	23%	27%
Disagree	15%	13%	17%	9%	29%	18%
Strongly disagree	8%	7%	8%	10%	10%	13%
Don't know / Not sure	15%	12%	18%	6%	28%	22%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	28%	38%	31%	26%	21%	22%
Agree	34%	37%	38%	35%	27%	34%
Disagree	15%	15%	15%	12%	17%	15%
Strongly disagree	8%	5%	8%	10%	10%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	15%	6%	8%	16%	25%	19%

There is no connection between mining and exporting fossil fuels and bushfires.

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
Strongly agree	15%	22%	10%	18%	9%	16%	18%
Agree	25%	31%	19%	24%	25%	28%	21%
Disagree	20%	18%	22%	20%	20%	19%	25%
Strongly disagree	17%	14%	19%	15%	21%	17%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	22%	15%	29%	23%	24%	20%	26%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Strongly agree	28%	11%	22%	11%	25%	10%
Agree	34%	21%	32%	18%	37%	17%
Disagree	15%	25%	17%	19%	12%	21%
Strongly disagree	8%	20%	7%	40%	4%	14%
Don't know / Not sure	15%	22%	22%	12%	21%	38%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
Strongly agree	28%	20%	14%	15%	6%	19%
Agree	34%	23%	24%	23%	24%	28%
Disagree	15%	22%	23%	21%	20%	18%
Strongly disagree	8%	20%	20%	12%	18%	15%
Don't know / Not sure	15%	15%	19%	28%	32%	20%

The Federal Government is currently reviewing ways to boost recruitment for emergency services volunteers, such as volunteer firefighters. One proposal that has been suggested is to develop a similar system to the Army Reserve, who are encouraged and supported in their service through protections in their workplaces, tax benefits, and assistance with medical services.

Would you support or oppose a model similar to the Army Reserve for volunteer firefighters?

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Strongly support	39%	41%	36%	40%	33%	39%	37%
Support	46%	44%	48%	46%	50%	50%	42%
Oppose	3%	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%	4%
Strongly oppose	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	10%	12%	9%	12%	8%	16%

	Total	Labor	Coalition	Greens	PHON	Other
Strongly support	39%	40%	39%	40%	33%	32%
Support	46%	46%	47%	45%	43%	49%
Oppose	3%	1%	3%	3%	5%	3%
Strongly oppose	1%	1%	2%	1%	3%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	11%	9%	11%	17%	14%

	Total	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Strongly support	39%	45%	29%	33%	39%	43%
Support	46%	38%	53%	51%	45%	46%
Oppose	3%	4%	3%	1%	1%	3%
Strongly oppose	1%	1%	3%	0%	1%	1%
Don't know / Not sure	11%	12%	12%	14%	14%	6%

ⁱ Bureau of Meteorology (2023) *High Risk Weather Season Outlook*, <https://nema.gov.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/Bureau%20of%20Meteorology%20High%20Risk%20Weather%20Season%20Outlook%20presentation.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Australian Government (2020) *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements*, <https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/natural-disasters>; Emergency Leaders for Climate Action and Climate Council (2020) *Australian Bushfire and Climate Plan: Final report of the National Bushfire and Climate Summit*, <https://emergencyleadersforclimateaction.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/australian-bushfire-climate-plan-1.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Karp (2023) 'Australia 'better prepared' for bushfires than ahead of black summer as government considers national community service', *The Guardian Australia*,

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