AFL FANS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND OF AFL ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE
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  How worried are you about climate change?
  How much do you think climate change will harm you personally?
  How much do you think climate change will harm future generations of people?
  How important is the issue of climate change to you personally?
  How much would you trust the following people to share information about climate change with the community?

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
  Climate change will have an impact on how AFL is played professionally
  Climate change will have an impact on how football is played at the local grassroots level
  The AFL has a responsibility to help AFL clubs reduce their carbon footprint. Eg. by installing renewable energy at their home grounds & offsetting flights
  The AFL has a responsibility to help local football clubs switch to clean energy and reduce their electricity bills
  AFL clubs have a responsibility to reduce their own carbon footprints. Eg. by installing renewable energy at their home grounds & offsetting flights
  AFL players have a responsibility to talk about social and environmental issues
  AFL players have a responsibility to talk about climate change

Would you be willing to support your AFL club taking climate action with a slight increase in membership fees?

Would you be in favour of AFL clubs communicating their climate action with their fan base?

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:
  I would be in favour of an AFL player talking about a social or environmental issue close to their heart
  I would be in favour of an AFL player talking about how climate change has impacted them and their sport
  I would be in favour of an AFL player talking about how climate action can safeguard the game for future generations
  I would be excited for my AFL club to be the first to go carbon neutral

Please indicate your level of support for AFL clubs taking the following actions within their business operations. Eg. What clubs can do at their training grounds & headquarters like the Punt Road Oval or the Holden Centre.

Do you follow any of the following on social media? Please select all that apply.

Which other professional sports do you follow in Australia? Please select all that apply.

Comments from participants

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2

MONASH CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH HUB
KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, AFL fans were in support of significant club and AFL action on climate change.

- Relatively large proportions of those surveyed remained undecided or neutral for many of the questions. This isn’t necessarily a bad thing, but suggests that clubs & players’ capacity as environmental spokespeople hasn’t fully been considered by fans and might require priming.

- In a promising result for future AFL-based climate communication, only 15% of fans were not in favour of AFL clubs communicating their climate action with their fan bases. This suggests clubs could be a safe starting place to begin climate communication initiatives.

- Unsurprisingly, due to its politically agnostic nature, club activity based on renewable energy attracted the most widespread support, even from otherwise dismissive fans.

- The need for any climate communication to be authentic emerged from participants. There appeared to be a general feel across several of the questions and in the comments at the conclusion of the study that if players were personally passionate and authentic about the issue, it would be much better received.

- In line with findings in other Australian climate population surveys, there is a small proportion of AFL fans (approximately 10%) who don’t believe in climate change and do not support AFL action on climate change.
INTRODUCTION

This report documents the findings of a survey of 567 Australians and their views on AFL action on climate change. The research was undertaken by the Monash Climate Change Communication Research Hub (MCCCRH) on behalf of FrontRunners, a movement of athletes working to protect the future of sport.

The MCCCRH works with a range of stakeholders to ensure their strategies are underpinned by evidence-based climate communication. AFL and AFLW players were identified by FrontRunners as a key group to communicate climate messages to the general public. However, there was a lack of available data on Australians’ perceptions of AFL players, along with the AFL itself and associated clubs, as trusted sources of climate information.

As such, the research aimed to investigate and determine a baseline of the climate change perceptions of AFL / AFLW fans in Australia and was intended to provide insights on the sorts of messages that resonate with AFL fans.

Specifically, the research aimed to:

- provide baseline data on who in the AFL / AFLW community fans see as authoritative & trustworthy figures to discuss climate change
- provide baseline data on who in the AFL / AFLW community fans see as having a responsibility to take action on climate change
- provide baseline data on what sorts of climate actions AFL / AFLW fans perceive as appropriate from AFL clubs and officials
- provide baseline perspectives of AFL / AFLW fans perspectives of climate change
METHODOLOGY

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

The survey recorded the views of 567 Australians who identify as AFL / AFLW fans. To ensure the survey’s key findings were of the highest relevance, those who didn’t identify as AFL / AFLW fans were removed from the sample. All participants were also screened to ensure they were over the age of 18.

Demographics of Respondents

Respondents were of the following ages and genders:

Gender of respondents

Age of respondents
Respondents supported the following clubs:
RESULTS

The following questions examined the climate change perceptions of AFL / AFLW fans in Australia. The questions also specifically examined fans’ views on the sorts of climate action that could be taken within the league, including whose responsibility it would be to drive this. Preferred communicators, or trusted sources of climate information within the league were also examined.

Do you think climate change is happening?

A significant majority of AFL fans accepted the scientific consensus on climate change. As shown here, seven in ten AFL fans believe that climate change is occurring. Just 7% of AFL fans outrightly rejected the scientific consensus on climate change, while a further 23% expressed they were unsure either way.

Of the fans who were sure climate change was happening, 58% expressed they were very sure with a further 38% somewhat sure. Of the just 7% of fans who expressed they didn’t believe climate change was occurring, a majority of them (62%) were very sure in their belief, with a further quarter expressing they were somewhat sure.

Beyond whether or not fans felt the phenomenon was in fact happening or not, the survey then asked how much they felt that Australian sport in general had already felt the impacts of climate change.
How much has sport in Australia already felt the impacts of climate change such as extreme heat, flooding, heavy storms, drought?

In total, 83% of AFL fans believed that sport in Australia had already felt the impacts of climate change, ranging from 19% believing a great deal, 38% believing a moderate amount and just over a quarter believing a little. Analysis also suggests that fans who had already noticed the impacts of climate change were more likely to be worried or concerned, which has been detailed below.

How worried are you about climate change?

A little over 75% of fans indicated some level of worry on climate change, with just over 50% either very or extremely worried. A little under 25% of fans indicated they were not worried about climate change.

How much do you think climate change will harm you personally?

When it came to how much climate change would harm them personally, more than eight out of ten AFL fans believed they would experience some level of personal harm. This ranged from approximately 19% thinking a great deal, 35% thinking a moderate amount and 30% thinking a little.
How much do you think climate change will harm future generations of people?

Not surprisingly, when asked how much climate change would harm future generations, the weighting of the answers were reversed entirely. 43% of fans believed that future generations would be harmed a great deal. With 29% believing a moderate amount and 19% a little. Just 10% of fans believed future generations would not be harmed by climate change at all.

How important is the issue of climate change to you personally?

When asked how important climate change was to them personally, a quarter of AFL fans expressed that it was extremely important to them, with a further 32% suggesting it was very important. This was followed by 23% expressing that it was somewhat important, with just 19% suggesting it was not too important to them personally.
How much would you trust the following people to share information about climate change with the community?

The survey then asked fans their levels of trust in a range of AFL and non-AFL related community figures. ‘Neither trust nor distrust’ was the most common response for all linked to the AFL. This included AFL players, AFLW players, AFL teams, AFLW teams, AFL / AFLW officials & spokespeople and sports medical staff. A full list of percentages can be found in Appendix 1.

When it came to active trust versus active distrust of AFL related sources, in all cases, fans had more trust in these groups than not. Sports medical staff had the highest combined trust score (strong trust & somewhat trust) of 48%, followed by AFL players at 41% and AFLW players, and both teams all at 37%. Active distrust (strong distrust & somewhat distrust) was considerably lower for all groups. The strongest result was for officials and spokespeople at 18%, with AFLW players & teams at 16% and AFL teams at 15%. These results suggest that with the correct messaging, players, team & club staff could be effective climate communicators to AFL fans.

Of the non AFL associated people, climate scientists were the most trusted, with 69% of AFL fans expressing active trust in them. This was followed by environmental groups at 52% and non-sports medical staff such as doctors & nurses at 45%. Politicians recorded the strongest active distrust amongst AFL fans, with 42%, followed by journalists at 32% and environmental groups at 22%. These results mirror previous general population studies conducted by the MCCCRH which found similar results of trust and distrust.

Fans were then asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with a range of statements on players and club climate change engagement and activity.
To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

**Climate change will have an impact on how AFL is played professionally**

45% of fans agreed that climate change would have an impact on how AFL was played at the professional level. On the other end of the spectrum, 26% either strongly or somewhat disagreed with this notion.

**Climate change will have an impact on how football is played at the local grassroots level**

At the grassroots level, the number of fans who believed climate change would impact how the game was played jumped up slightly, to 47%, with the number of fans who disagreed decreasing to 23%.

**The AFL has a responsibility to help AFL clubs reduce their carbon footprint. Eg. by installing renewable energy at their home grounds & offsetting flights**

Just over six out of every ten AFL fans surveyed agreed that the AFL has a responsibility to help clubs reduce their footprint, with only 14% denying this responsibility.
The AFL has a responsibility to help local football clubs switch to clean energy and reduce their electricity bills

Agreement on the AFL’s responsibility to help local clubs switch to clean energy and reduce electricity bills remained above half, but dropped a little to 59%.

AFL clubs have a responsibility to reduce their own carbon footprints. Eg. by installing renewable energy at their home grounds & offsetting flights

Just under two out of every three AFL fans (65%) agreed that clubs themselves had a responsibility to reduce their own footprints. These results, paired with the two previous questions, suggest that fans see a shared responsibility for climate action between clubs and the AFL.

AFL players have a responsibility to talk about social and environmental issues

When asked how much they agreed individual players had a responsibility to talk about social and environmental issues, AFL fans weren’t as supportive as they had been on the collective responsibility of clubs. 43% of fans indicated some level of agreement with the statement, and just over a quarter disagreed.
AFL players have a responsibility to talk about climate change

On the issue of climate change specifically, the results were largely similar, with agreement dropping to just under 40%, neutral responses at 34% and disagreement increasing slightly to 27%.

Would you be willing to support your AFL club taking climate action with a slight increase in membership fees?

When it came to putting their money where their mouths were, more than half of the paying member fans suggested that they would be definitely or somewhat willing to support their AFL club with a slight increase in membership fees. Please note, 20% of all respondents were not paying members.

Would you be in favour of AFL clubs communicating their climate action with their fan base?

In a promising result for future AFL-based climate communication, only 15% of fans were not in favour of AFL clubs communicating their climate action with their fan bases. This saw just under 60% in favour of such action, with a further 27% undecided.
Fans were then asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with a range of statements, this time focusing specifically on individual player climate engagement and communication. On the whole, there was broad support for players using their platforms to talk about social and environmental issues, including climate change specifically.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

**I would be in favour of an AFL player talking about a social or environmental issue close to their heart**

59% of fans suggested they would be in favour of players talking about social or environmental issues close to their hearts, with just 15% disagreeing with this sentiment. This aligns with the earlier support expressed for clubs communicating their climate action.

**I would be in favour of an AFL player talking about how climate change has impacted them and their sport**

Interestingly, when asked specifically about climate change, the level of support jumped up slightly to 61% of fans, with disagreement remaining at 15%.
I would be in favour of an AFL player talking about how climate action can safeguard the game for future generations

Taking a slightly different lens, the level of support from fans dropped slightly to 58% when asked about players framing climate action as a way they and the community can safeguard the future of the game for generations to come.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I would be excited for my AFL club to be the first to go carbon neutral

A little more than half of AFL fans surveyed agreed that they would be excited for their AFL club to go carbon neutral.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please indicate your level of support for AFL clubs taking the following actions within their business operations. Eg. What clubs can do at their training grounds & headquarters like the Punt Road Oval or the Holden Centre.

Fans were then asked about their level of support on particular actions clubs could take. As can be seen below, club based emissions reduction activities and sustainability initiatives were strongly supported by a large proportion of AFL fans. These activities simultaneously attracted the lowest levels of non-support. These findings are unsurprising, given that previous studies have shown renewable energy is generally less polarising than climate change, and that single use-plastic and waste reduction activities have strong community support from all segments. A full list of percentages can be found in Appendix B.

(Graph on following page)
Of the activities listed, improving waste management in their facilities was the club-based action most highly supported by AFL fans at just under 80%. This was followed by just over three quarters of fans supporting the installation of renewable energy at these same facilities, and a further 74% supporting the removal of single use plastic from club operations.

Do you follow any of the following on social media? Please select all that apply.

Fans were then asked to specify whether they engaged with their favourite players and clubs online. As can be seen here, the official social accounts for AFL clubs attracted the highest followings from fans at 25%, followed by the AFL itself at 17% and individual players at 7%. Please note, as respondents were asked to select all that apply, the number of responses does not add up to 567 as with other questions.
Which other professional sports do you follow in Australia? Please select all that apply.

Fans were then asked to specify whether they followed any other sports professionally in Australia. Cricket was the most popular at 22%, followed by tennis at 19% and rugby league at 15%.

CRICKET 22%
TENNIS 19%
RUGBY LEAGUE 15%
SOCCER 12%
RUGBY UNION 7%
BASKETBALL 6%
NETBALL 5%
HOCKEY 3%
OTHER 2%
I DON'T FOLLOW ANY OTHER SPORTS AT THE PROFESSIONAL LEVEL IN AUSTRALIA 9%
Comments from participants

Finally, fans were given the opportunity to comment on the survey in the free text box at the completion of the survey. A selection of comments that genuinely engaged with the survey content were included.

As these comments were taken directly from the free text box at the completion of the survey, they have not been edited and may contain errors. It is also worth keeping in mind that the skew towards negative commentary is not representative of the generally positive results of the study.

- At first I couldn't see a connection between AFL players and climate change but further through the survey I understood that a lot better.
- I think AFL clubs should get on with the business of playing footy and only speak on issues such as drugs and domestic violence and the like.
- It is about time that sports clubs, teams and players take action with regards to climate change.
- Really cannot see what AFL can do, other than follow business in general with efficient lighting, rail transport etc.
- Very interesting and important subject.
- Please explain what makes an AFL/AFLW player a "Climate Change" expert???????
- I would actively withdraw my financial membership if a club started spouting about climate change. Politics and sport don't mix.
- Great survey.
- I would love my club Essendon to be first to jump on board this initiative as they are a proven socially responsible club that care deeply about their members and community.
- Sporting clubs/organisations should stick to sport not be pushing inane social dogmas! Sick of it…
- The AFL could do the most good here by their air travel arrangements, and some kind of offset for their night game electricity use.
- The first survey I have seen that provides a definition of climate change though it would have been better to say it is a natural phenomenon that is made worse by the actions of humans. By leaving out the first important point lessens my support of this survey. I am very strong in my belief of climate change and the problems it will bring, but we need people to have a proper understanding so as we have a way of tackling. The current approach allows the client deniers a free hit and continually sets us back
- AFL players should not get involved with social or political issues. We, the public pay money to watch them play a sport we all love to escape the reality and bullshit that goes on in day to day life. We don't want two worlds colliding.
- The AFL shouldn't take sponsorship from big oil companies like Shell. That would be a good step forward.
● Not sure why the AFL or any football club should be responsible for climate change issues, that in my opinion should be the responsibility of State & Federal Governments.

● AFL footballers are professionals in their field moving out of that field has to be their personal choice and not prompted by money in respect to making public comments on issues.

● AFL and its players should stick to what they get paid to do; play football and butt out of political agendas like climate change!!!

● My responses to whether I support players publicly expressing views about their passions is dampened by examples like Filou - I enjoy all points of view, but I do not appreciate being lectured or forced to only accept a single view. If I thought that they would put forward evidence based points that enable the community to make informed decisions I would love their personality status to help initiate public thinking about climate change.

● I don't want to hear from AFL players talking about climate change etc. when they’re obviously only reading from a script.
## APPENDIX 1

**Q. How much would you trust the following people to share information about climate change with the community?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>STRONGLY DISTRUST</th>
<th>SOMEWHAT DISTRUST</th>
<th>NEITHER TRUST NOR DISTRUST</th>
<th>SOMEWHAT TRUST</th>
<th>STRONGLY TRUST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFL PLAYERS</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFLW PLAYERS</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFL TEAMS</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFLW TEAMS</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFL / AFLW OFFICIALS</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPORTS MEDICAL STAFF</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOURNALISTS</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLIMATE SCIENTISTS</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-SPORTS MEDICAL STAFF</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICIANS</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOCAL FOOTBALL CLUBS</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## APPENDIX 2

**Q. Please indicate your level of support for AFL clubs taking the following actions within their business operations.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>STRONGLY UNSUPPORT</th>
<th>SOMEWHAT UNSUPPORT</th>
<th>NEITHER SUPPORT NOT UNSUPPORT</th>
<th>SOMEWHAT SUPPORT</th>
<th>STRONGLY SUPPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INSTALLING RENEWABLE ENERGY AT CLUB FACILITIES</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARBON OFFSETTING PLAYER AND STAFF FLIGHTS</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USING ELECTRIC VEHICLES TO AND FROM GAMES, TRAINING AND EVENTS</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEKING SPONSORSHIP DEALS WITH COMPANIES ACTIVELY ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REMOVING SINGLE USE PLASTICS FROM CLUB OPERATIONS</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPROVING WASTE MANAGEMENT AT CLUB FACILITIES</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>