



MONASH
CLIMATE
COMMUNICATION
HUB (MCCH)

LOSING HOME GROUND ADVANTAGE

COMMUNITY FOOTBALL IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

PILOT SURVEY REPORT



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

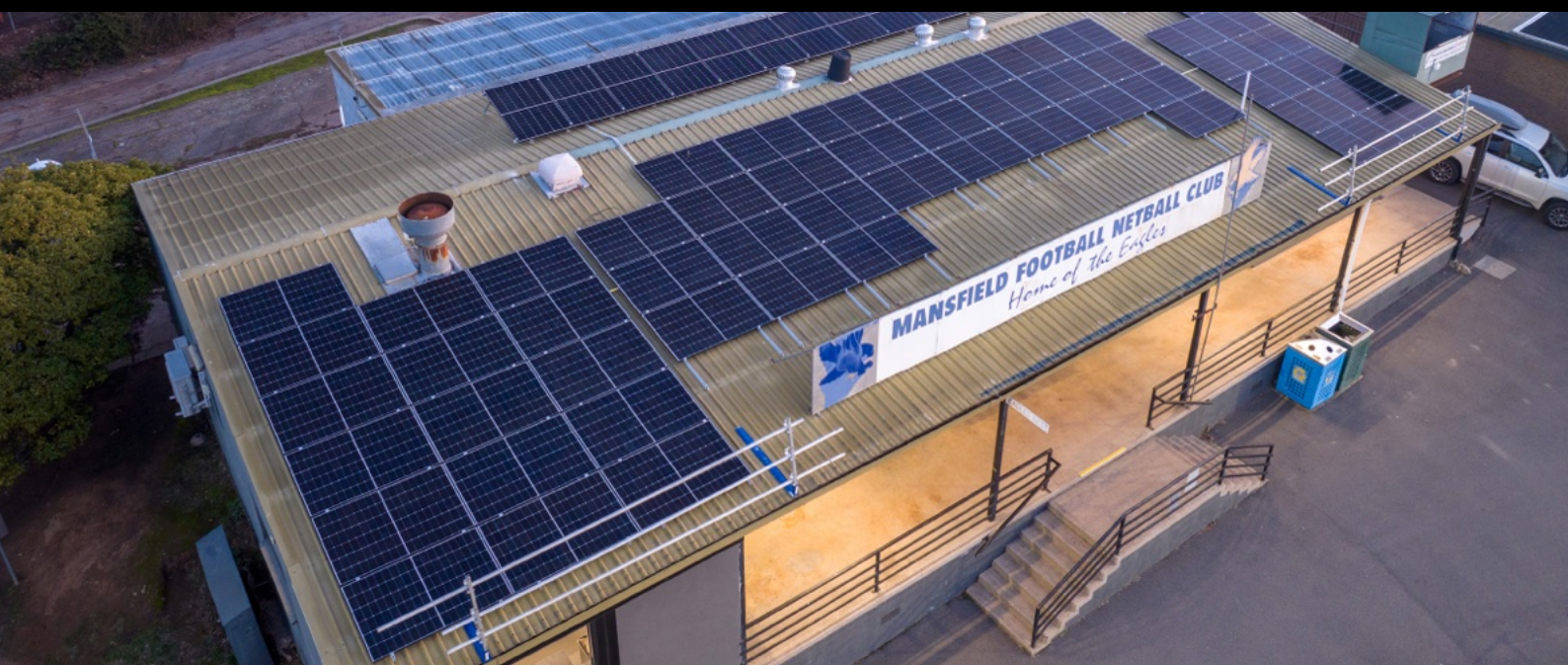
This report presents findings from a survey of 199 participants connected to Australian Rules football, including fans, players, administrators and club members.

The study examines awareness of climate change impacts on community football clubs, perceived importance of climate change, support for climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives, and willingness to financially contribute to club-based climate action.

Key findings

- Climate change matters to most respondents, but its local impacts are less visible. More than three-quarters (76%) considered climate change a 'very' or 'extremely' important issue, yet 52% were unsure whether it had affected their community club. This suggests that the opportunity is in helping people connect climate change with what they can see and experience at their local football facilities
- 88% of respondents who had observed climate impacts on their community club indicated willingness to financially contribute to climate action
- Recognition of climate impacts was strongly associated with willingness to pay ($V = .438$, $p < .001$)
- Support for club-based climate initiatives was high, with 44% supporting 8-11 of the proposed actions (the list included actions such as installing solar panels, batteries or drinking fountains)
- There were no significant differences across age groups of genders with willingness to pay for community club climate action

Overall, findings suggest community football represents a valuable and increasingly important setting for climate engagement, adaptation and mitigation.



INTRODUCTION

Australian Rules football holds a central place in Australian culture and community life. More than 9.7 million Australians (Roy Morgan, 2025) – around 35% of the population (ABS, 2026) – support an AFL club, and participation reached a record 625,000 people in 2025 across community football, AFL Nines, Auskick, Superkick and school competitions (Australian Football League, 2025). At the grassroots level, community clubs bring together players, families, volunteers and supporters across generations, providing opportunities for physical activity while fostering social connection, belonging and community identity.

Australia provides an important setting in which to examine the relationship between climate change and community sport, with the country experiencing rising average temperatures and more frequent and intense extreme weather events (Australian Climate Service, 2025; Dingle et al., 2026). These changes expose sporting participants, facilities and infrastructure through both slow-onset pressures – rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and drought – and rapid-onset events such as floods and bushfires (Glasser, 2020; IPCC, 2018).

For community sport, these pressures have practical implications for when and how sport can be played. Extreme heat and poor air quality can create risks for participant health and safety, while drought, flooding and changing rainfall patterns can affect playing surfaces, lead to ground closures and increase the cost and complexity of maintaining facilities. Community sporting organisations are also managing these risks alongside existing pressures on finances, volunteers, staff and time. Recent Australian research examining the perspectives of community sport managers found that climate change is compounding the challenges of delivering local sport and increasing the need for clubs to plan for changing conditions (Dingle et al., 2026). Understanding how community sport responds to these pressures matters both for protecting participation and for supporting the longer-term resilience of clubs and sporting infrastructure.





Prior research by the Monash Climate Change Communication Research Hub (now the Monash Climate Communication Hub - MCCH) points to strong awareness of these issues among AFL fans and support for action by sporting organisations. A 2021 survey of 567 AFL and AFLW fans found that 83% believed Australian sport had already experienced climate impacts including extreme heat, flooding, heavy storms and drought, and that fans who had noticed these impacts were more likely to report concern about climate change (MCCCRH, 2021). Almost half (47%) believed climate change would affect how football is played at the grassroots level. The same survey found strong support for organisational action: 65% agreed AFL clubs had a responsibility to reduce their own carbon footprints, and 59% agreed the AFL had a responsibility to help local clubs switch to clean energy and cut electricity costs. Support was strongest for practical operational measures. Almost 80% backed improved waste management, more than three-quarters supported renewable energy installation and 74% supported removing single-use plastics (MCCCRH, 2021).

These findings point to an appetite for climate action among fans of professional Australian Rules football. However, they only reflect the views of AFL and AFLW fans and their attitudes towards professional clubs and the AFL – not the perspectives of people directly connected with community football clubs. This is an important distinction: community clubs operate under different conditions, relying heavily on volunteers and limited financial and human resources while managing facilities and playing conditions directly exposed to climate hazards (Dingle et al., 2026). Their capacity to respond is therefore likely to depend both on the resources available to them and on the willingness of their members and broader club communities to support action.

This study aimed to understand player, volunteer and fan awareness of the climate impacts affecting Australian Rules football, and the willingness of these groups to pay to support club-based climate mitigation and adaptation.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was advertised through multiple channels including by the AFL, Footy for Climate and the Monash Climate Communication Hub. It was conducted online, with participants screened to ensure they were over the age of 18. Statistical analyses was conducted to examine relationships between:

- Recognition of climate impacts
- Willingness to pay for climate action
- Perceptions of personal harm from climate change
- Support for club-based climate initiatives

Participant profile

A total of 199 participants completed the survey. Nearly three in five respondents (59%) were aged between 36 and 55 years, 22% were younger than 36 years and 19% were aged 56 years or older. Male participants accounted for 55% of the sample, while 43% were women and 2% identified with other genders.

Geographical location

Most respondents were located in Victoria (85%), with more limited participation from New South Wales (6%), Queensland (3.5%), Western Australia (3%) and South Australia (2.5%).

Connection to football

Respondents represented a range of connections to Australian rules football, including:

Role	Percentage of total sample
Community football fan	64.3
AFL/AFLW member	35.2
Parent of junior player	22.6
Community club member	17.6
Community club administrator	14.6
Senior player	10.1
Other (umpires, grandparents, former players etc.)	12.1

Note: Respondents could select multiple roles so percentages do not sum to 100.

Limitations

This pilot survey has key limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The sample of 199 respondents were self-selected and recruited primarily through AFL, Footy for Climate and Monash Climate Communication Hub channels – audiences that are likely to already have some level of engagement with climate issues or with Footy for Climate’s work. The sample was also heavily concentrated in Victoria (85%), limiting the extent to which findings can be generalised nationally.

These limitations are consistent with the exploratory nature of a pilot study and highlight the need for further research with a larger, more representative sample. However, the findings provide valuable insight into the attitudes and perceptions of an engaged football audience and identify several statistically significant relationships that warrant further investigation.

FINDINGS

Recognising climate impacts increases willingness to pay for climate action

Recognition of climate impacts on community football clubs was strongly associated with willingness to financially contribute to climate action (Cramer’s V = .438, p < .001).

Among respondents who had observed climate impacts at their club, 88% were willing to contribute financially to support action, compared with just 32% of those who had not observed any impacts (Table 1). Even among respondents who were unsure whether their club had been affected, 79% were still willing to contribute. This suggests that willingness to pay is driven less by certainty about impacts than by any signal that they may be occurring – a distinction worth keeping in mind when framing club communications.

Respondents who were willing to financially support club climate action tended to favour small, one-off donations, however larger one-off or yearly donations were also supported. Table 1 shows the distribution of these preferences.

Table 1. Proportion of willing respondents supporting different payment preferences

Donation frequency	How often would you be willing to provide financial support of the amounts below?		
	Up to \$10	Up to \$50	\$50 or more
One off donation	30%	25%	17%
Monthly donation	8%	2%	2%
Yearly donation	9%	12%	13%





Willingness to pay is consistent across age and gender

Neither gender nor age showed a statistically significant relationship with willingness to financially support club-based climate action. Support for climate action therefore appears to have broad appeal across demographic groups, though a larger sample would be needed to confirm this with confidence.

As willingness to pay represents an intention rather than an observed financial contribution, further research is needed to determine how closely these stated intentions align with actual behaviour.

Recognising climate impacts is linked to greater personal concern

Most respondents saw climate change as a personal risk: 57% believed it would affect them 'a great deal' and a further 26% 'a moderate amount'. Recognising climate impacts on Australian Rules football, specifically, was significantly associated with this sense of personal risk (Cramer's $V = .386$, $p < .001$) – respondents who had noticed impacts on football were also considerably more likely to see climate change as a serious personal threat.

Perceived importance of climate change predicts support for club initiatives

Three-quarters of respondents (76%) rated climate change as a ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ important issue, 15% said it was ‘somewhat important’, and only 9% rated it as ‘not too’ or ‘not at all’ important. This perceived importance was significantly correlated with support for club-based climate initiatives ($r = .322$, $p < .001$). Respondents were asked about support for the 11 potential measures listed in Figure 1.

Almost half of respondents (44%) supported between eight and eleven actions. Respondents who rate climate change as a more important issue were, unsurprisingly, more supportive of clubs acting on it, but the strength and consistency of that link suggests there’s a receptive base to build on. A ranking of the 11 measures by number of responses is provided in Figure 1.

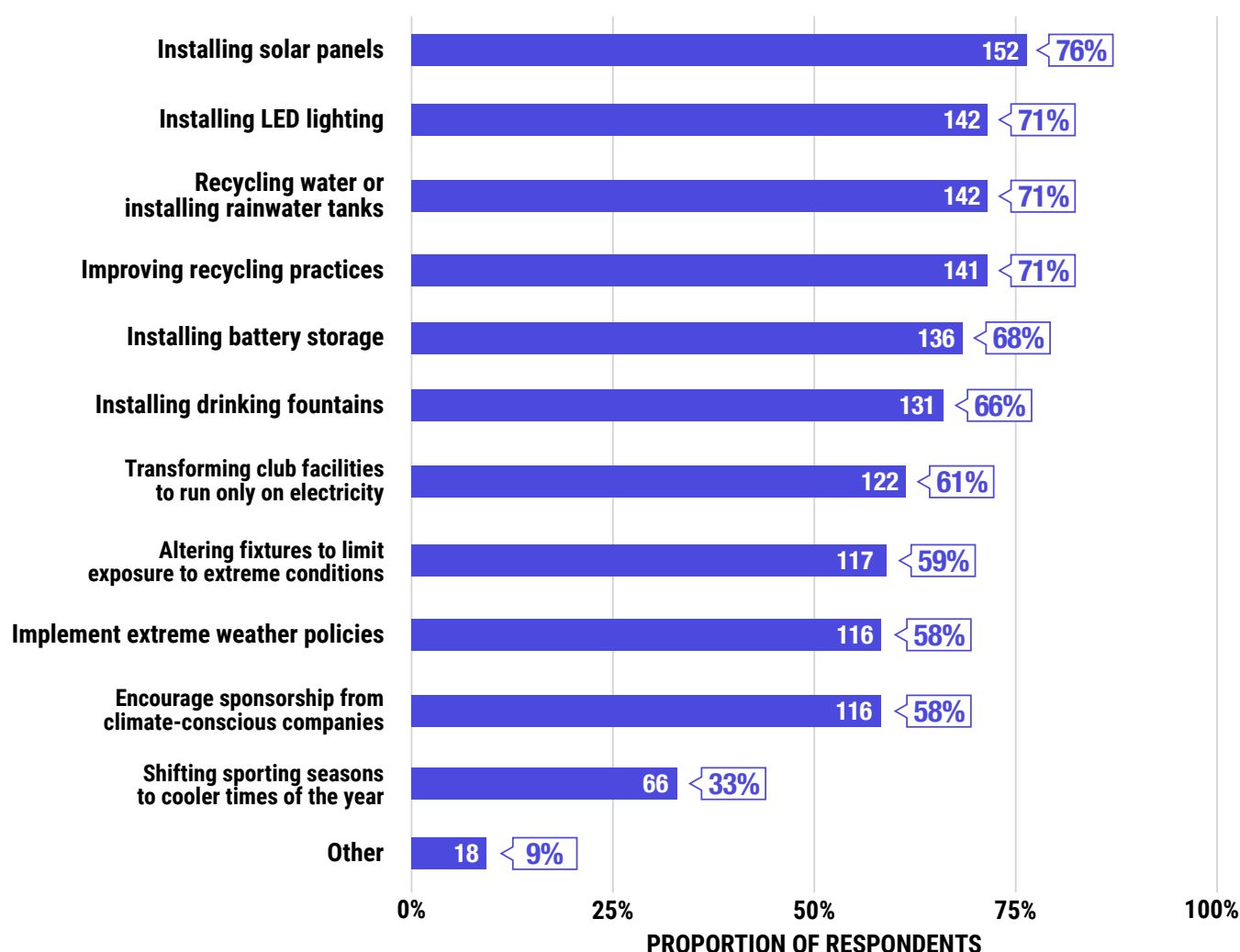


Figure 1. Proportion of respondents supporting club implementation of each of 11 climate actions



Recognising club-level impacts is associated with support for greater action

Support for community club initiatives differed significantly depending on whether respondents recognised that their club had already been affected by climate change ($V = .439$, $p < .001$). Respondents who reported seeing climate impacts on their club tended to support a greater number of initiatives, with 33% supporting 10-11 initiatives. In contrast, among those who reported that their club had not experienced climate impacts, 32% supported no initiatives.

More than half of respondents (52%) were unsure whether their community club had been affected by climate change despite most recognising climate change as an important issue more broadly. Support within this group was highly variable: 39% supported 9-11 initiatives, 21% supported 5-6 initiatives, while 10% supported only one initiative. This suggests that uncertainty about whether climate change has affected a club does not necessarily translate into low support for action. Rather, views were more varied among respondents who were unsure about existing impacts. In contrast, respondents who recognised or had witnessed impacts showed consistently higher levels of support for future club initiatives. This presents an opportunity to connect people's broad concern with what's happening on their local ground.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This pilot survey suggests community Australian Rules football is a promising setting for climate engagement. Respondents who recognised climate impacts on their club were more concerned about climate change personally, more supportive of club-based mitigation and adaptation measures and more willing to help pay for them. This pattern held regardless of age or gender. The clearest opportunity lies in the gap between impact and awareness: over half of respondents didn't know whether their own club had already been affected, even though recognising an impact was consistently linked to stronger support for action.

Based on these findings, recommendations are as follows:

- **Build awareness of local, club-level impacts, rather than relying on general climate messaging.**

Since recognition was a strong predictor of willingness to pay and support for action, communication that connects climate change to concrete, club-specific challenges – such as heat-affected fixtures, ground closures and storm damage – may help make these impacts more tangible to club members.

- **Don't wait for certainty to ask for support.**

Willingness to pay was high even among respondents who were unsure whether their club had been affected, suggesting clubs can build support proactively rather than waiting until impacts are glaring.

- **Lead with highly supported initiatives.**

Given broad support across demographic groups, initial club-level action could prioritise the measures with the widest appeal (e.g. solar, LED lighting, extreme weather policies) to build momentum before tackling less commonly supported changes that might require additional effort to build endorsement due to their cost or complexity.

This pilot study provides an important evidence base for understanding climate engagement within community Australian Rules football. The findings identify practical opportunities for clubs and sporting organisations to strengthen awareness, build support and prioritise climate initiatives that resonate with their communities. They also establish a foundation for larger-scale research to test these patterns across a more representative sample and explore how they vary between clubs, communities and regions.





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