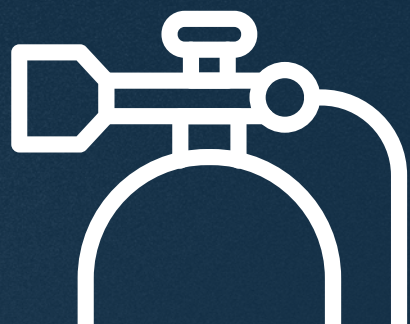




DIVING INTO CLIMATE ACTION

Shaping a National Policy Agenda Based on Dive
Community Experiences of Climate Change



A report by Divers for Climate in
collaboration with research partners

NOVEMBER 2025

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Report design: Divers for Climate

Cover image: Darian Woods

About This Report

This report was produced by Divers for Climate. It presents preliminary research findings designed to inform future climate engagement strategies that reflect the voices of those on the front lines of Australia's oceans. The report aims to support policymakers, researchers, community organisations, and climate communicators in advancing inclusive, equitable, and community-led climate action.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Divers for Climate acknowledges Indigenous and First Nations people as the first custodians, scientists, and explorers of the ocean, and we recognise their enduring connection to land, sea, and community. We acknowledge that Indigenous peoples are disproportionately affected by ocean climate impacts and must play a central role in shaping solutions. We commit to standing in solidarity with those most impacted and listening to, learning from, and amplifying Indigenous knowledge and wisdom in all our work.

Divers for Climate was inspired by and created on the land and sea Country of the Gimuy Walubarra Yidinji, Yirriganydji, and Gunggandji peoples. We also pay our deep respects to the Traditional Owners across Australia's coastlines and waters, whose stewardship continues to protect the places we love. We honour Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

ABOUT DFC

Divers for Climate (DFC) is a **national community of divers, ocean advocates, and marine tourism professionals** working together to drive climate action for people and oceans. Our vision is a climate-resilient dive community in a thriving ocean, and our mission is to empower divers to influence climate solutions by building connections, strengthening capacity, and shifting narratives so that the voices of those closest to the sea are heard. We believe that a more resilient ocean future depends on recognising and supporting the people already on the frontlines of climate change. By equipping divers with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to act, and by promoting narratives of hope, agency, and opportunity, DFC works to transform the dive community into a powerful force for protecting both people and oceans.



Diving during a coral bleaching event. Photo: The Undertow Media.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Divers are frontline witnesses to the impacts of climate change on our ocean. In 2025, hundreds of divers from around Australia shared their firsthand experiences of climate change — and their vision for the future. This national survey was led by Divers for Climate in collaboration with research partners to better understand how the dive community experiences and responds to a rapidly changing ocean.

For many divers, climate change is something they witness almost every day — from bleached coral to shifting marine life to less predictable ocean conditions — the places they know best transforming before their eyes. These lived experiences position divers as key frontline witnesses and credible voices on climate change.

This report brings those voices together to show who these divers are, what they are seeing, and the systemic change they want to drive forward. It highlights how the dive community can play a critical role in shaping public understanding and informing stronger climate policy at all levels.

KEY FINDINGS

91% of divers across Australia have **directly experienced the impacts of climate change** with respondents describing impacts from coral bleaching, changes in species, extreme weather conditions, flood impacts, algal blooms and increasing water temperatures, among others.

50% of those with direct experiences **report impacted income, property or costs**, with 12% reporting severe financial effects, and many reporting negative consequences to their emotional, physical, and cultural wellbeing.

83% of divers are **concerned about fossil fuel related activities** that contribute to climate change and directly affect oceans (e.g., oil drilling, gas extraction, oil spills)

90% support more urgent and **ambitious government policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.**

INTRODUCTION

2025 has been a challenging year for Australia's marine ecosystems. Severe marine heatwaves - unprecedented in their intensity and duration - saw sea surface temperature rise by up to 3°C above historic averages [1]. These extreme conditions triggered widespread and simultaneous coral bleaching in the Great Barrier Reef and Ningaloo World Heritage Areas [2,3], fuelled the onset of South Australia's algal bloom that has affected tens of thousands of marine animals [4], and contributed to further shifts in the range and abundance of marine species, including the southward spread of invasive species that are decimating kelp forests along the southeast coast [5, 6]. These changes have been directly experienced by Australia's dive community, who are often the first to witness how climate change is transforming the marine ecosystems upon which they depend for professional and recreational activities.

Despite being on the front lines of climate change - and despite their reliance on healthy marine ecosystems for their livelihoods and recreation - there is limited evidence that captures how climate-driven changes in the marine environments affect divers' businesses, recreational activities, and wellbeing, or how concerned the dive community is about climate action. This results in the dive community being overlooked in climate policy discussions and decision-making, which limits opportunities for their knowledge and perspectives to inform effective, locally-grounded solutions.

WHY NOW?



Photo credit: Darian Woods

Addressing this gap is essential for ensuring climate policies reflect the realities of those who are most directly affected by changes in marine ecosystems. 2025 has made clear that the coming years and decades will be marked by intensifying climate impacts and in an evolving policy environment [7], in which dive sites and the livelihoods of dive operators are under increasing uncertainty. By understanding the experiences, perceptions, and priorities of divers, policymakers and other stakeholders can better incorporate the insights of those who engage directly with marine ecosystems into climate policy and programming, so **our future is shaped by those with their heads and hearts in the sea.**

THE NATIONAL DIVER SURVEY



The National Diver Survey was designed to capture **how the Australian dive community is experiencing, understanding, and responding to climate change**. Led by Divers for Climate, the study aimed to document firsthand experiences of climate change underwater, explore how these changes affect divers' lives and livelihoods, and understand levels of concern and support for climate action within the community.

HOW IT WAS CONDUCTED

The survey was conducted online between February and April 2025, reaching both recreational and professional divers across Australia. It was promoted through Divers for Climate networks, dive centres, and partner organisations. More than 800 valid responses were received — representing a diverse cross-section of divers by age, gender, experience, and location. Participants shared both quantitative data (about diving activity and climate views) and qualitative reflections on how climate change is shaping their work, recreation, and wellbeing. This project was conducted through a collaboration between Divers for Climate and researchers from the University of Tasmania, the University of Queensland, RMIT University, and the University of North Carolina.

CONSIDERATIONS

Like any voluntary survey, participation was self-selected, meaning results may reflect the views of more engaged or climate-engaged divers. However, the scale and depth of participation make this study one of the most comprehensive insights yet into how divers are witnessing and responding to ocean change. The findings provide a credible evidence base for policy dialogue, future research, and stronger collaboration between the dive sector, government, and community groups.

This project represents one of the first national efforts to systematically collect and analyse data from divers about climate change. By translating lived experience into evidence, it helps connect ocean-based communities with national decision-making.





Photo credit: Divers for Climate

THE DIVERS BEHIND THE DATA



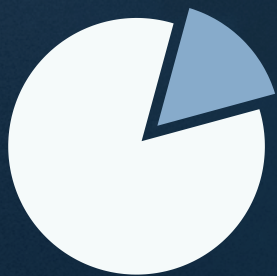
Divers for Climate represents a growing community of people who live, work, and play in the ocean. Through the National Diver Survey, we've captured the voices of divers from every corner of Australia, from tropical to temperate waters across our coasts. Our participants include recreational divers and snorkellers, professional dive guides and instructors, marine scientists, conservationists, and tourism operators — people who have seen changes in the ocean firsthand, and who care deeply about its future. The following pages present their perspectives.

Locations of survey participants across Australia.



DEMOGRAPHICS:

WHO RESPONDED?

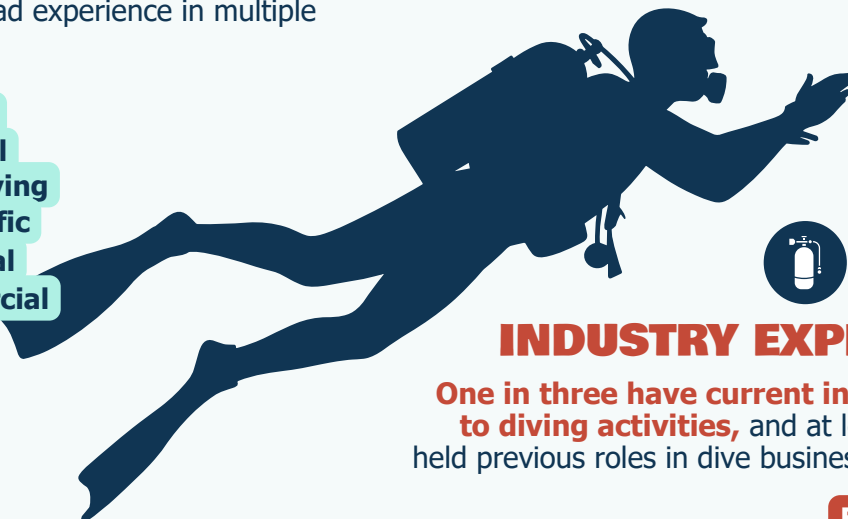


- **61.4%** of participants identified as female.
- **Age range of 18-75+**, with nearly a third between 25-34.
- **2.2%** of participants identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.
- **51.4%** have been diving for 10 years or more.

DIVE TYPE

The divers who took part in the survey represent a **broad mix of experience and expertise**, spanning all major types of diving activity. Many had experience in multiple types of diving.

87.1% SCUBA
77.3% Snorkel
40.6% Freediving
24.9% Scientific
9.6% Technical
7.2% Commercial



INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE

One in three have current income related to diving activities, and at least 50% have held previous roles in dive businesses, including:

5.4% Owner
10.6% Manager
34.7% Instructor or guide
19.6% Other staff

OUR OCEAN CONNECTION

Divers in this survey have explored almost every major ocean region, from the Great Barrier Reef and Ningaloo to the Caribbean, the Red Sea, and Southeast Asia. Most time is spent in Oceania (78%) and Southeast Asia (56%), where coral reefs and pelagic environments are most common. Divers spend most of their dives in:

78%
coral reefs

28%
open ocean

5%
mangroves

18%
kelp forests

27%
seagrass meadows

49%
rocky or shellfish reefs

6%
polar areas

BEYOND DIVING
80% visit the ocean at least once a week

- **68%** swim or surf
- **67%** relax on the coast
- **54%** socialise by the ocean
- **29%** go boating
- **12%** fish

SEEING CHANGE

Divers across Australia are witnessing climate change in real time. **More than nine in ten (91%) survey participants said they have personally observed the effects of climate change on the marine environment** — from coral bleaching and species loss to changes in water temperature, storm damage, and shifting marine life. For most divers, these changes are not isolated events: they are part of a clear pattern unfolding across sites and seasons.



"IN SYDNEY WHERE I DIVE REGULARLY, I FEEL THE WATER WARMING EACH YEAR. MY DRYSUIT STAYS IN THE CLOSET LONGER"

One in five participants experienced above-average sea temperatures while diving, whether through temperature readings on their dive computers, changes in the equipment they chose to wear, or simply by feeling the warmth themselves.

Photo credit: The Undertow Media



Over 80% of divers described witnessing coral bleaching, and other signs of heat stress such as fluorescing, and/or coral mortality. Observations range geographically across Australia's oceans, including in temperate and cooler waters (e.g., sea sponges in Tasmania), and many of the locations visited overseas.

"... [THE MASS BLEACHING EVENT] WAS UNREAL, SO MUCH MORE DRAMATIC THAN I EVER IMAGINED. I WAS LIKE WATCHING SOMETHING DIE. I DIDN'T EVER THINK I WOULD SEE THE REEF AGAIN AFTER THAT BECAUSE IT REALLY SEEMED LIKE THE END."

"OCEAN TEMPS HAVE INCREASED IN RECENT YEARS RESULTING IN MORE TROPICAL SPECIES OF MARINE LIFE TO VENTURE DOWN TO THE NSW SOUTH COAST... WE HAD A WHALE SHARK SITED OUT OFF BATEMANS BAY AND AGAIN A WEEK OR SO LATER DOWN AT BERMAGUI."

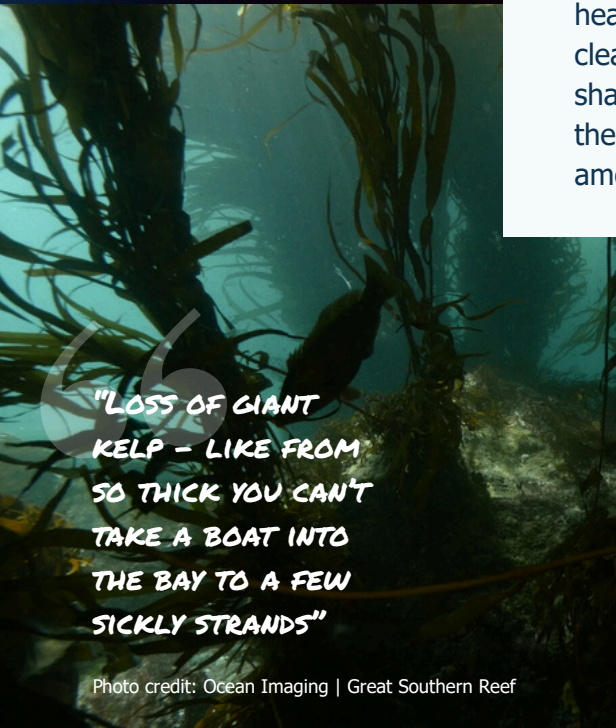


Almost half of the survey participants describe observing shifts in species.

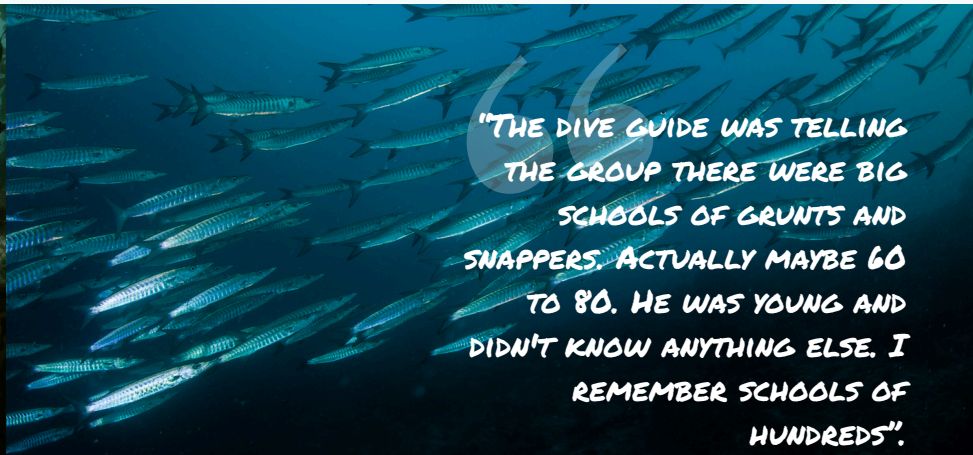
Some described coral reefs transitioning from being coral-dominated to overrun by algae. Others observed kelp forests being heavily grazed and covered by sea urchins. Several participants noted clear declines in marine life, such as the disappearance of fish and sharks. Others also noted tropical species appearing in places where they were not previously found, as well as changing migration patterns among seasonal species.

"LOSS OF GIANT KELP - LIKE FROM SO THICK YOU CAN'T TAKE A BOAT INTO THE BAY TO A FEW SICKLY STRANDS"

Photo credit: Ocean Imaging | Great Southern Reef



"THE DIVE GUIDE WAS TELLING THE GROUP THERE WERE BIG SCHOOLS OF GRUNTS AND SNAPPERS. ACTUALLY MAYBE 60 TO 80. HE WAS YOUNG AND DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ELSE. I REMEMBER SCHOOLS OF HUNDREDS".



Participants described increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather, and noted the increasing impact of rising sea levels. Many reported altered surface conditions and reduced visibility. Several highlighted the ecological impacts of these events, including widespread coral and giant clam mortality from flood plumes. Others raised concerns about sea-level rise and coastal erosion worsening each year.

FEELING CHANGE

Experiencing climate change underwater is taking a real toll on people's lives. Divers describe a mix of concern, sadness, and frustration as they witness the ocean they know so well begin to change. **Many spoke about how these experiences affect their mental health, livelihoods, and sense of the future.** What happens beneath the surface is shaping how people feel and think on land — a reminder that climate impacts are not only ecological, but deeply human.

Among divers who experienced climate change in the ocean:



32% said it **severely** affected their mental health



4% reported **strong impacts** on physical health or safety



26% felt **serious impacts** to cultural practices, traditions, or community activities



"IT IS EMOTIONAL TO SEE REEFS YOU LOVE AND WORK PROTECTING TO BECOME BLEACHED IN A MATTER OF DAYS."

Some participants described mental health challenges and eco-anxiety. Others mentioned changes to career paths, family planning, or business operations. A few said the experience hadn't changed their behaviour, it simply confirmed what they already knew. Together, these stories show that **divers are not passive observers of climate change.** They are a frontline community, living with its effects both above and below the surface.

"I HAVE STOPPED SNORKELLING AND DIVING LOCALLY BECAUSE IT'S TOO DEPRESSING TO SEE THE DEVASTATION."

**"...WATCHING THE IMPACTS
IN REAL TIME HAS BEEN
GUT WRENCHINGLY
DEVASTATING. CLIMATE
CHANGE IS REAL, IT'S
CAUSING A REAL IMPACT
AND THINGS NEED TO
CHANGE."**



WORKING WITH CHANGE

Dive professionals and operators across the dive industry described practical pressures linked to climate change that is impacting their day-to-day work, creating challenges and emotional strain that **affects how they guide, teach, and manage operations**. Many are having to adapt rapidly to maintain safety, visitor experiences, and the viability of their businesses in an increasingly uncertain environment.

"AS AN OWNER OF A COMMERCIAL DIVE BOAT THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE LEADS TO SO MANY CANCELLATIONS DUE TO ROUGH SEAS, WINDS OR JUST DIRTY WATER FROM STORM RUN OFF OR ALGAL BLOOMS INFLUENCED MY DECISION TO SELL THE BOAT."

Operationally, **climate change has made the diving industry far more unstable**. Increasingly severe weather, poorer water quality, and reduced wildlife encounters have disrupted schedules and made long-term planning difficult. Tour cancellations and unreliable conditions have financial consequences, and some worry that certain dive locations and career paths may no longer be viable in the coming years. In some cases, these mounting challenges have influenced people's decisions to leave the industry altogether.



50%

of those with direct experiences report impacted income, property or costs.

12%

reported severe financial impacts.



"[THERE IS] GROWING CANCELLATION OF TOURS DUE TO CYCLONIC AND EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS"



Only 14%

of dive professionals said they feel confident they have the knowledge and skills to take action on climate change.

“WORKING IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY MEANT I WASN'T ABLE TO FULLY TALK ABOUT [MASS CORAL BLEACHING] WITH GUESTS. THIS LED TO MISINFORMATION SPREADING AND PEOPLE GOING HOME SAYING THE REEF WAS DEAD. I FELT COMPLETELY HELPLESS AND UNABLE TO SPREAD AWARENESS.

Many dive professionals spoke of the frustration of **not being able to communicate openly with visitors** about what they were seeing. This created a sense of isolation and made it harder to maintain confidence and positivity when guiding or teaching. Several noted that the visible decline in marine ecosystems affected their motivation, their interactions with guests, and their overall wellbeing.



Photo credit: Becky Evers



Photo credit: Peter Corrigan

CALLING FOR ACTION

91%

support more urgent and ambitious government policies on climate change.

92%

support stronger climate adaptation measures for vulnerable island and coastal communities.

92%

support increased climate education for visitors and related training for dive staff.

89%

support a clean energy transition across the marine tourism sector.

52%

of divers with personal experiences of climate change said it has influenced the way they vote.

The experiences shared by divers translate into clear expectations for **action with overwhelming support for more ambitious government policies and practical solutions.** For this community, addressing climate change is not optional, it's essential to safeguarding their work, their wellbeing, and the places they love for generations to come.

I WANT TO EDUCATE EVERYONE I MEET ABOUT CORAL REEFS AND THE EFFECT OF CLIMATE CHANGE. I ALSO WORRY THAT I'LL GET BURNOUT AND FATIGUE FROM ALWAYS BEING CONCERNED THAT THE REEFS ARE SUFFERING AND WITHOUT GOVERNMENT CHANGE WE WON'T BE ABLE TO PROTECT THEM.



OUR

RECOMMENDATIONS

Divers are uniquely placed to witness and communicate the realities of climate change. They see underwater impacts earlier, more frequently, and more directly than most Australians. Through this research, divers have demonstrated not only a deep connection to the ocean but a willingness to engage in solutions, positioning them as powerful messengers for change. Harnessing that perspective can help strengthen national climate policy, guide adaptation measures, and inspire broader public engagement with ocean and climate action.

1. RECOGNISE DIVERS AS A TRUSTED POLICY VOICE

- Engage the dive community in the **development and review of climate strategies and policies**
- Support initiatives that strengthen community-based knowledge and **diver-led adaptation measures**.
- Actively incorporate diver knowledge and experiences into **industry risk management and sustainability plans**
- **Promote diver contributions to climate leadership** through accreditation programs, incentives, public recognition, and other forms of professional acknowledgement
- Integrate **diver-generated climate data** into climate & environment monitoring and reporting

2. WORK WITH DIVERS & THEIR CLIMATE STORIES

- Leverage diver stories to highlight **narratives of mitigation, adaptation and resilience** in marketing and public communication, strengthen evidence-based messaging, and inform policy development
- Provide resources and training to **help divers communicate climate challenges and solutions** effectively with customers and communities
- Support **diver-led storytelling** and collaborate with them on new education initiatives
- Create **industry training modules** addressing climate impacts and resilience

3. SUPPORT DIVERS AS THEY EXPERIENCE THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

- Support investment and training to **enable low-carbon and climate-resilient** options for businesses owners and dive professionals
- Foster **peer networks and professional communities** focused on adaptation and resilience
- **Support research** that informs the adaptive practices that dive operators and professionals can adopt
- Provide industry-specific **wellbeing and mental health resources** and support programs
- **Include dive professionals and operators** in national and regional adaptation planning, workforce transition programs, and wellbeing initiatives



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