

I lost my home in the South Coast bushfires. Here's what I'd like to say to the PM

Nick Hopkins

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Dear Mr Morrison,

Today I stand by the smouldering ruins of my beautiful home on the NSW South Coast. Since New Year's Day, climate change has suddenly become very personal for me.



Like thousands of others, Nick Hopkins and Heike Sutherland are dealing with the loss of their family home. Picture: Supplied

You have said you understand my grief. I have heard you are a religious man. My fervent hope is that your God grants you the humility to admit that you do not understand me at all. You have stood by as members of your party have insulted, belittled and ignored people like me when we urged you and your predecessors to take climate change more seriously.

You took no action when my Deputy Prime Minister called people like me a raving lunatic when we dared to link the bushfire emergency to climate change. By your silence you are complicit. May your God grant you the wisdom to understand that my rage at you and your predecessors is

an entirely rational response to a set of present and oncoming *unnatural* disasters from which you have failed to protect me.

You have said you understand my suffering. My heartfelt desire is that your God grants you the ability to see how hollow and insincere that feels to me when you (and Labor) continue to promote the thermal coal industry, which is fanning the flames of intense suffering of humans and animals worldwide. Australian coal is out there in the world being burnt every day and night. Please Mr Morrison, if only for God's sake, join the dots.

If you come to console me in my time of grief, I will not shake your hand until you and your colleagues promise to refuse donations from all fossil fuel companies. I would dearly like to be consoled by you, but I am choking on the hypocrisy of your actions. Until you get serious about political donation reform, your pronouncements will always be tainted by the stench of your largest donors.



Nick Hopkins and Heike Sutherland's Malua Bay home was destroyed in the New Year's Eve fires. Picture: Supplied

You will not earn my respect until you and your colleagues dare to take the Australian public on a journey to transition away from thermal coal mining and exports. Tobacco farmers in the US transitioned away from their industry when the link between cigarettes and cancer became public. And when the link between asbestos and mesothelioma was understood, we left all known reserves in the ground. However, now that the link between the burning of coal and disastrous weather events is well established, both you and the opposition have thrown your support behind opening up the Galilee Basin, starting with the Adani mine.

People like me have repeatedly told you we don't have to sacrifice the economy if we leave coal in the ground. We have abundant renewable energy resources to drive industries which value-add to our raw materials like iron ore and bauxite before exporting them. But your mind is not open to exploring new economic options, and you and your colleagues are not courageous enough to take on the poisonous shock jocks and vested interests of our fractured media landscape.

Nevertheless, I have been petitioning, emailing and calling you and your colleagues for over a decade to tell you that to stabilise our climate we have to leave Australian coal underground and unburnt. When I have tried to say that by carefully and compassionately winding back the coal industry we can be a shining example to other countries, you have ridiculed me and proudly paraded a lump of coal in Parliament. When I marched with hundreds of thousands of other intelligent and rational citizens, including children, in climate change rallies, you have ignored and even castigated me. Indeed, on the world stage you have proudly exploited dubious accounting practices to seemingly minimise my country's carbon emissions. Shirking responsibility like that is not the Australian way.

You are deaf to the pleas of fire management experts, climate scientists, moderates, conservationists and ordinary folks. In a desperate attempt get you and your colleagues to grasp the seriousness of the situation the planet is facing, I even decided that non-violent civil disobedience was the only option left to me. I paddled onto Newcastle Harbour, the largest coal port in the world, with hundreds of kayakers in a symbolic closure of the port for one day. I sat down on the floor of Parliament House as part of the People's Parliament for action on climate change. Your party chose to trivialise the issue and to brand me as a criminal who needed to be handed increased penalties, including prison sentences.

And now, as long predicted, a massive bushfire is sweeping Australia. Like thousands of others, I stare at the smoking rubble that was once my family home. I am two parts shattered and three parts enraged. So don't tell me you understand me. You and your colleagues only understand your own limited narratives. Again, may your God grant you that elusive quality of humility that you may all hang your heads in shame. But may you also be granted the courage to finally act in accordance with the science for the sake of us all, including our unborn grandchildren.

May your home remain standing.

Nick Hopkins is a Canberra-born retired landscape architect. He and his wife are residents of Malua Bay. They lost their home in the fast-moving bushfires on New Year's Eve.

NB. Nick is a member of Bega Meeting of Quakers

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