



CLIMATE OF THE NATION

**Australian attitudes to climate
change and its solutions**

April 2008

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Executive Summary

In the aftermath of what has been described as the world's first "climate change" election, public interest remains strong on climate issues. The public appear to be cautiously sceptical about the major parties and their commitment to climate change. There remains a strong desire for further initiatives backed by meaningful targets.

Concern for climate change remains at high levels. **Nine of 10 Australians (89 per cent) are now concerned about climate change, with half (49 per cent) being either extremely concerned (17 per cent) or very concerned (32 per cent).**

The majority of Australians cannot distinguish between the political parties on climate change. While 40 per cent of Australians believe that the Labor Party is better at handling climate change, **the majority (52 per cent) are not prepared to rate either party as best.**

Perceptions of climate change are clearly a vote shifter – and an important point of differentiation between the parties. **Only seven per cent of people are currently prepared to rate the Coalition as the better political party on climate change.**

For most people, ratifying Kyoto is just one part of Australia's continuing response to climate change. **Almost eight of every 10 Australians (78 per cent) believe that, despite Australia having ratified Kyoto, we still need to take further urgent action to deal with climate change.** While 17 per cent have no opinion, only five per cent disagree that urgent action is still required.

There is an emerging theme in the research – that people expect to see more action from the Government and are prepared to back it up with changes in their own lives. Government action is supported by 97 per cent of the population with 84 per cent believing that governments should either make very large changes (38 per cent support) or large changes (46 per cent support). **Similarly, 94 per cent of people recognised that they need to make changes in their own lives to prevent further climate change.**

The high expectations people have of the Rudd Government in this space is translating into a **strong demand for detailed plans and science-based targets.** Eight of 10 people (80 per cent) want to see the government give climate change a very high priority (33 per cent) or a high priority (47 per cent) in their first three years in office.

In addition, most Australians want to see Australia lead the world with a government response to climate change which sets strong, early targets without delay. **Strong domestic targets are favoured by a clear majority,** with more than three quarters of Australians (78 per cent) believing that we should reverse growing levels of greenhouse pollution to achieve real reductions by 2012.

Other themes which emerged strongly through the research included:

- Particular concern regarding water use and the impact of water restrictions – despite the relative easing of the drought;
- Continued concern regarding complacency on climate change and the possible impacts on a future generation of young Australians;
- Growing awareness that climate change will provide businesses with opportunities in new and emerging industries;
- Emerging awareness that strong outcomes in international diplomacy will only be possible if strong domestic policies are implemented – and that this is in Australia’s national interest;
- Ever increasing general awareness of the science of climate change.

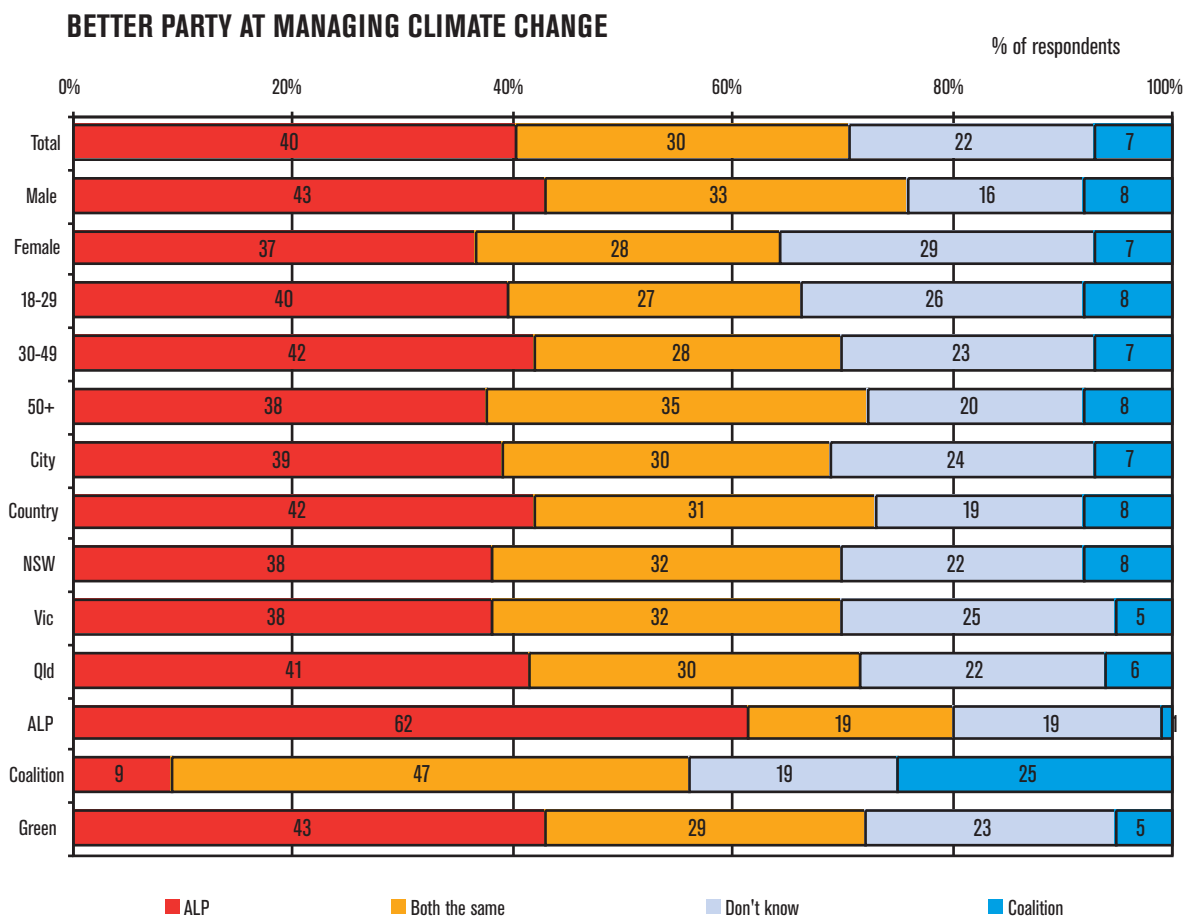
Latest Survey Research

How climate change continues to rate since the election

In the aftermath of what has been described as the world's first "climate change" election, public interest remains strong on climate issues. This can be attributed, to some degree, to ratification of Kyoto marking the first key decision of the new Rudd Government. Concern about climate change remains at historically high levels and polls demonstrate a strong desire for leadership and further initiatives, backed by meaningful targets.

While climate change leadership has consolidated in the brand of the Rudd Labor Government, Coalition support on these matters appears to have gone backwards.

Overall climate change leadership, however, remains up for grabs. The majority of Australians (52 per cent) are not prepared to rate either party as best, with 30 per cent considering them both to be the same and 22 per cent having no opinion. Last month 40 per cent selected Labor as the better of the major parties but this only a two per cent increase over the year. The Coalition's support has tumbled from 15 per cent to seven per cent.



Priorities for the Federal Government

The high expectations people have of the Rudd Government in this space is translating into a strong demand for detailed plans and science-based targets.

This is reflected in solid interest for the government maintaining climate change as a high priority during its first three years in office. This follows the community's support for the ratification of Kyoto and the relatively high level of satisfaction with the government's performance on climate change.

- Eight of 10 people (80 per cent) want to see the government give climate change a very high priority (33 per cent) or a high priority (47 per cent) in their first three years in office. Only 16 per cent believe that it should receive a low priority for government action.
- Most Australians are ready to support a new approach to energy generation and use in order to deal with climate change.
 - At the top of their list are clean sources of energy from wind and solar followed by greater efficiency in homes and cars and more money spent on public transport.
 - There is substantial support for greenhouse pollution targets by 2020 and prevention of further land clearing.
 - More than half the population also favour cutting subsidies for fossil fuels, introduction of a carbon trading system and investing in capturing and burying pollution from coal and gas.
- In addition, most Australians want to see Australia lead the world with a government response to climate change which sets strong, early targets without delay.
 - They want these to be focussed on reducing energy waste and increasing use of clean energy (solar, wind and geothermal).
 - They recognise that delays will cost us more in the long run and they want to see government investments reflect government policies on climate change.

On the importance of Australia showing leadership over these matters, the research is equally clear:

- 76 per cent agree "Our governments should make Australia a world leader in finding solutions to climate change" (32 per cent agree strongly)
- On the other hand, 60 per cent disagree "Because Australia is a small economy, it won't make much difference to global emissions if we reduce our greenhouse gas emissions" (16 per cent disagree strongly).

This again conforms with research commissioned by the Climate Institute last month which demonstrated the following outcomes:

- Strong domestic targets are favoured by a clear majority, with more than three quarters of Australians (78 per cent) believing that we should reverse growing levels of greenhouse pollution to achieve real reductions by 2012;
- Only four per cent of Australians oppose this negotiating position;
- Almost three quarters of Australians (73 per cent) expect the Government to show strong international leadership by introducing stronger policies to reduce greenhouse pollution in Australia;

- Around 68 per cent of Australians believe we should be doing more to help developing countries to reduce their emissions.

On the importance of early action, findings in our research demonstrate a growing understanding of the opportunities involved in minimising climate change impacts. Clearly, the Australian people want action – and want no further excuses.

- 69 per cent agree “The longer we delay action to cut greenhouse pollution, the more it will cost the Australian economy” (26 per cent agree strongly)

Climate Change Policy Solutions

Australians felt that by far the most convincing method by which carbon emissions could be reduced was by using renewable energy, followed by more efficient machinery. Ranking well behind were nuclear energy and clean coal technology as convincing ways to reduce carbon emissions.

(The Lowy Institute Poll 2007, Australia and the World, Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, The Lowy Institute, 31 August 2007)

There is overwhelming support for using new clean sources of electricity generation:

- 74 per cent support laws to ensure all new electricity generation comes from clean energy sources (30 per cent strongly support)
- 89 per cent support subsidising solar panels for a million Australian houses (52 per cent strongly support)
- 87 per cent support requiring 25 per cent of electricity generation to come from clean energy like wind and solar by 2020 (42 per cent strongly support).
- 78 per cent agree “Australia should lead the world in clean energy (solar, wind and geothermal) use” (35 per cent agree strongly)

Further, there is strong support for greater energy efficiency:

- 86 per cent support legislation for more efficient homes and cars (38 per cent strongly support)

There are a range of views for dealing with the problems created by the fossil fuel industry:

- 61 per cent support cutting subsidies that encourage fossil fuels (20 per cent strongly support)
- 53 per cent support investing in capturing and burying pollution from coal and gas (14 per cent strongly support)
- 45 per cent support reducing the size of our coal industry (14 per cent strongly support)

Support for nuclear reactors has failed to grow, with fewer than 30 per cent supporting – representing a small decline on a similar question last year.

Strong support for targets

Most Australians are prepared to support targets for reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, with strong support for both short and long term targets. There is also strong support for targets that are science-based or are agreed as part of international negotiations.

- 70 per cent agree “A strong 2020 target to cut greenhouse emissions is the key test of our government’s commitment to tackling climate change” (22 per cent agree strongly)

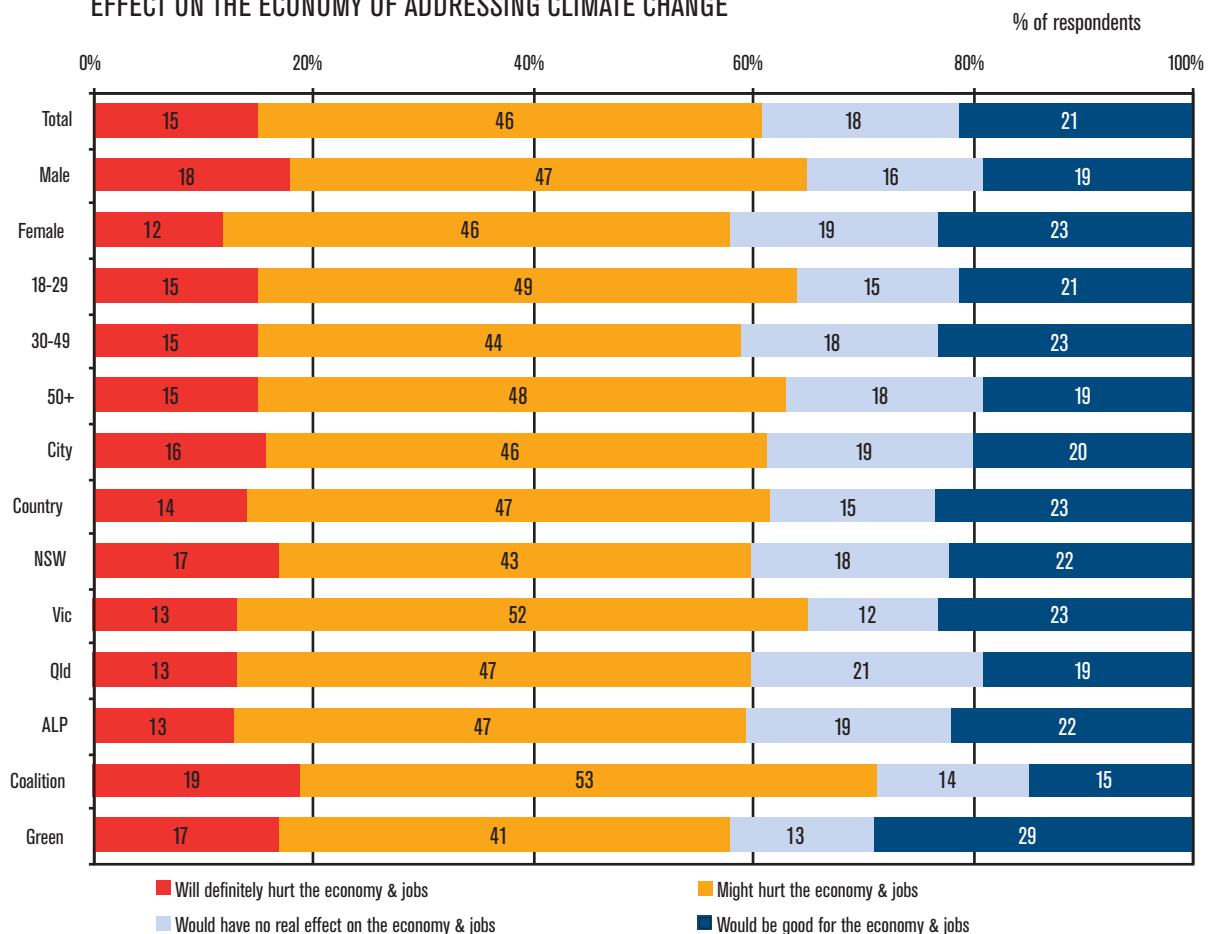
On the other hand, few people oppose Australia setting targets before the rest of the world.

In July 2007 AC Nielsen conducted a global online survey titled *Climate Change & Influential Spokespeople* which focused on how the world’s opinion on climate change was influenced by celebrities and influential spokespeople. It found that in Australia, celebrities such as Al Gore and Oprah Winfrey were the most influential group of people by far to influence people’s opinions on climate change.

(Climate Change & Influential Spokespeople, July 2007, Pg 6)

Effect on the economy of addressing climate change

EFFECT ON THE ECONOMY OF ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE



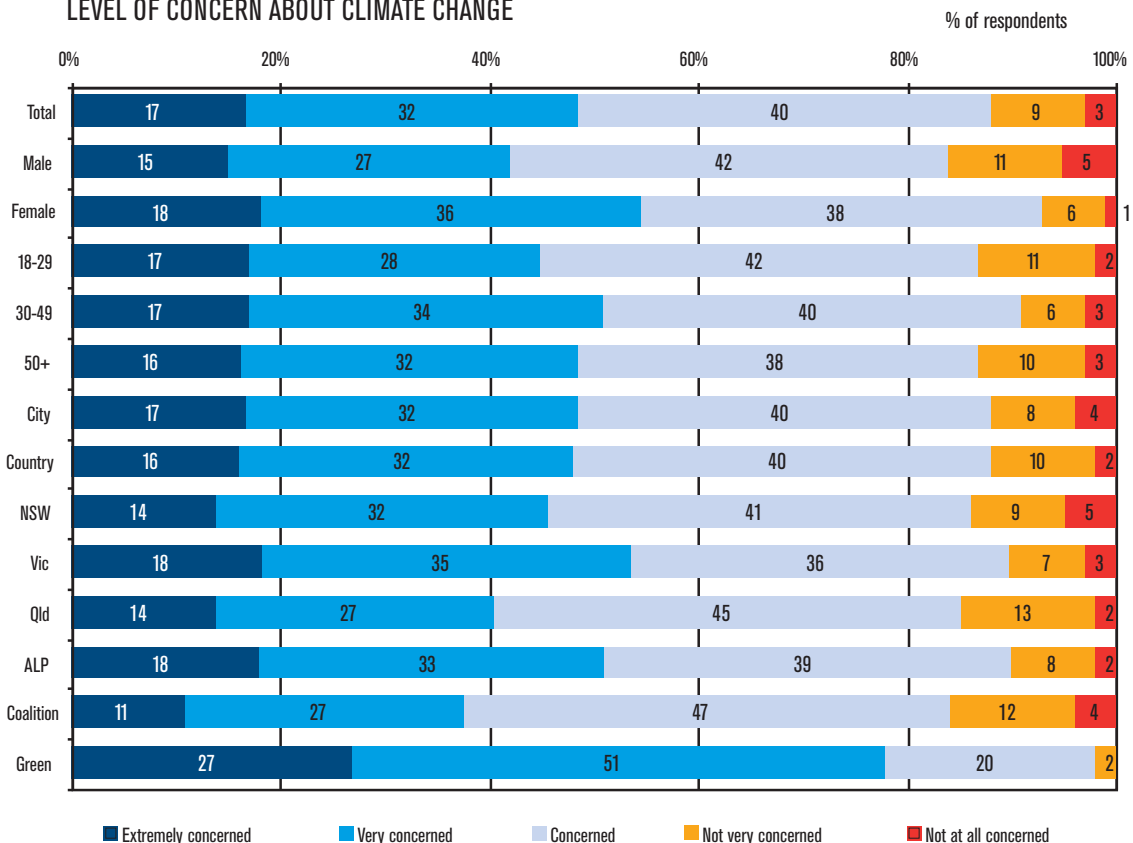
- Almost half the population (46 per cent) is unsure about the effect that addressing climate change will have on the economy and jobs. These people believe that addressing climate change “might hurt the economy and jobs”.
- The majority of the remaining population (39 per cent) believe that addressing climate change will have either a neutral or positive effect. One in five believe it will “have no real effect on the economy and jobs” (18 per cent) or that it will “be good for the economy and jobs” (21 per cent).
- This leaves only 15 per cent who believe that addressing climate change “will definitely hurt the economy and jobs”.

While concern remains high, issues of climate change are increasingly translating into concern about housing affordability, household energy and food bills, taxation, health care and national security. However, the research demonstrates that most Australians do not want action delayed because of arguments about jobs. This again is confirmed by The Climate Institute’s survey commissioned earlier in March 2008.

- Fewer than one in three (29 per cent) agreed with the notion that the government should delay action on climate change if jobs were at risk;
- The remaining 71 per cent of surveyed responses either opposed this position or had no real opinion.

General levels of concern about climate change

LEVEL OF CONCERN ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE



Concern for climate change remains at high levels. This is evidenced by the following data:

- Nine out of 10 Australians (89 per cent) are now concerned about climate change, with half (49 per cent) being either extremely concerned (17 per cent) or very concerned (32 per cent);
- A further four out of 10 (40 per cent) feel concerned about the issue. This leaves only three per cent of the population “not at all concerned” about the issue and a further nine per cent indicating they are “not very concerned”.
- Levels of concern are relatively consistent throughout the community. However, women tend to express more concern than men. While 16 per cent of males are unconcerned about climate change, only seven per cent of women feel this way.

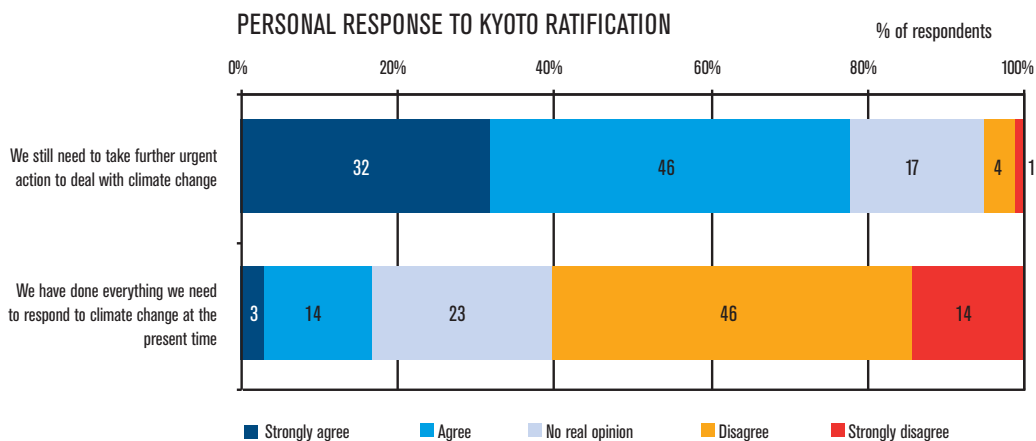
Continuing strong support for Kyoto ratification

The research is conclusive - there is virtually no opposition among the Australian population for the government's ratification of Kyoto. An overwhelming majority of the population now record their support to the decision.

Again, some further aspects of the research support these findings:

- Two thirds of the population (66 per cent) give either their strong support (33 per cent) or support (33 per cent) to the ratification of Kyoto. Only seven per cent either oppose (four per cent) or strongly oppose (three per cent) the decision. The remaining 28 per cent have no real opinion either way.
- Even among Coalition voters, only 17 per cent oppose the ratification decision while almost half (49 per cent) support it.

Australians want more action after Kyoto ratification

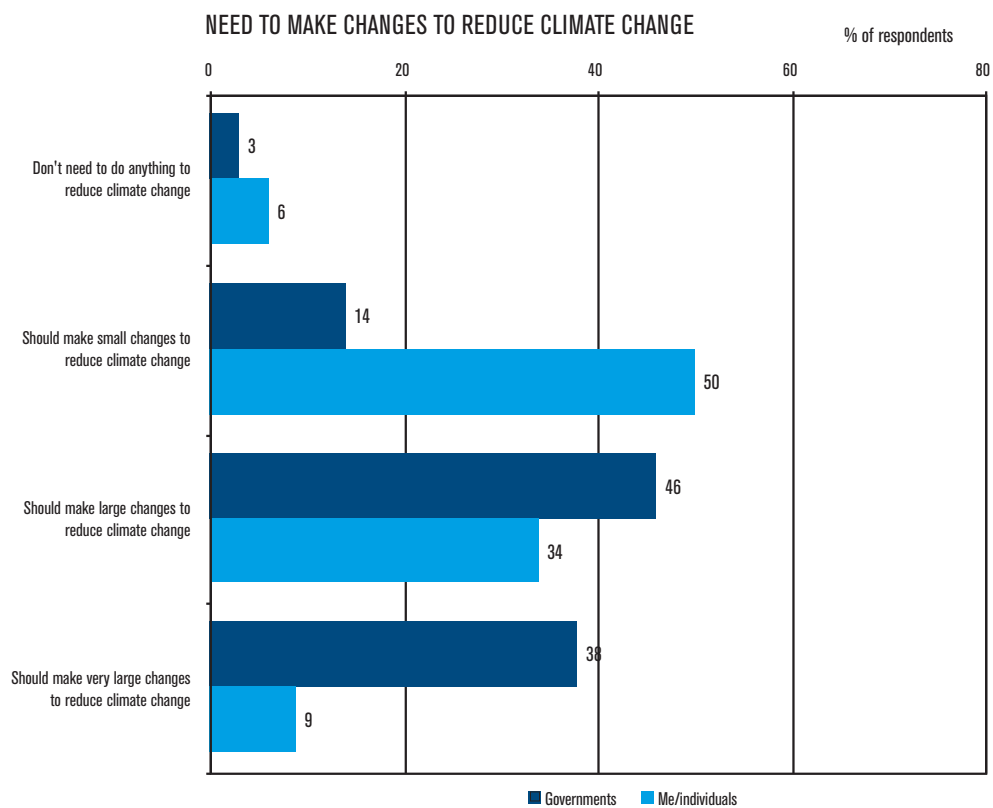


For most people, ratifying Kyoto is just one part of Australia's continuing response to climate change. Only a minority believe that the ratification means we don't have to do anything more at the present time or that other issues now take precedence over climate change.

There is a message here that Australians acknowledge that much has been achieved – but there is still much to be done. Again, this is evidenced by the following:

- Almost eight of every 10 Australians (78 per cent) believe that, despite Australia having ratified Kyoto, we still need to take further urgent action to deal with climate change. While 17 per cent have no opinion, **only five per cent disagree that urgent action is still required.**
- Very few people believe that we have done everything we need to respond to climate change at the present time. Only 17 per cent take this position, with only three per cent strongly agree with it. **The majority (60 per cent) disagree that we have done everything to respond at the present time.**

Preparedness to make changes to reduce climate change

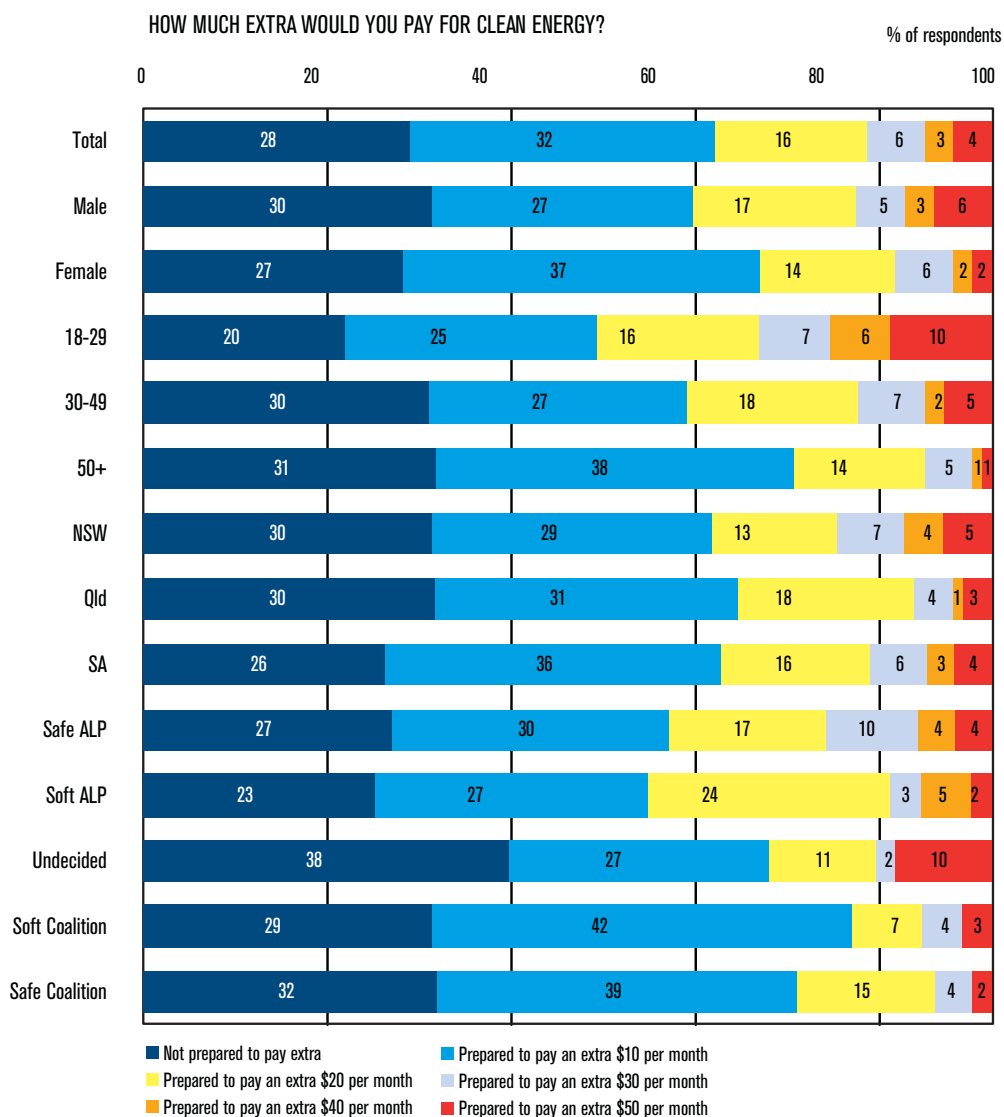


There is an emerging theme in the research – that people expect to see more action from the Government and are prepared to back it up with changes in their own lives. Again, there is considerable community support for both personal and government action to deal with climate change.

This marks a strong point of differentiation with perspectives countenanced among some commentators suggesting that Australians would be unwilling to adopt sustainable practices in their lives. Again, this is supported by the following findings:

- Government action is supported by 97 per cent of the population with 84 per cent believing that governments should either make very large changes (38 per cent support) or large changes (46 per cent support).
- Similarly, 94 per cent of people recognised that they need to make changes in their own lives to prevent further climate change. Half (50 per cent) are prepared to make small changes, a further third (34 per cent) are willing to make large changes and one in 10 (nine per cent) accept the need to make very large changes in their own lives.
- However, it is notable that respondents were much more likely to expect governments to make 'large' or 'very large' changes.

The majority of voters in the surveyed marginal seats in November were prepared to pay extra in electricity bills to ensure power came from renewable energy sources. The most common amount nominated to pay extra was \$10 per month (for 32 per cent of those surveyed) followed by \$20 per month (16 per cent) while only 28 per cent were not willing to pay any extra.

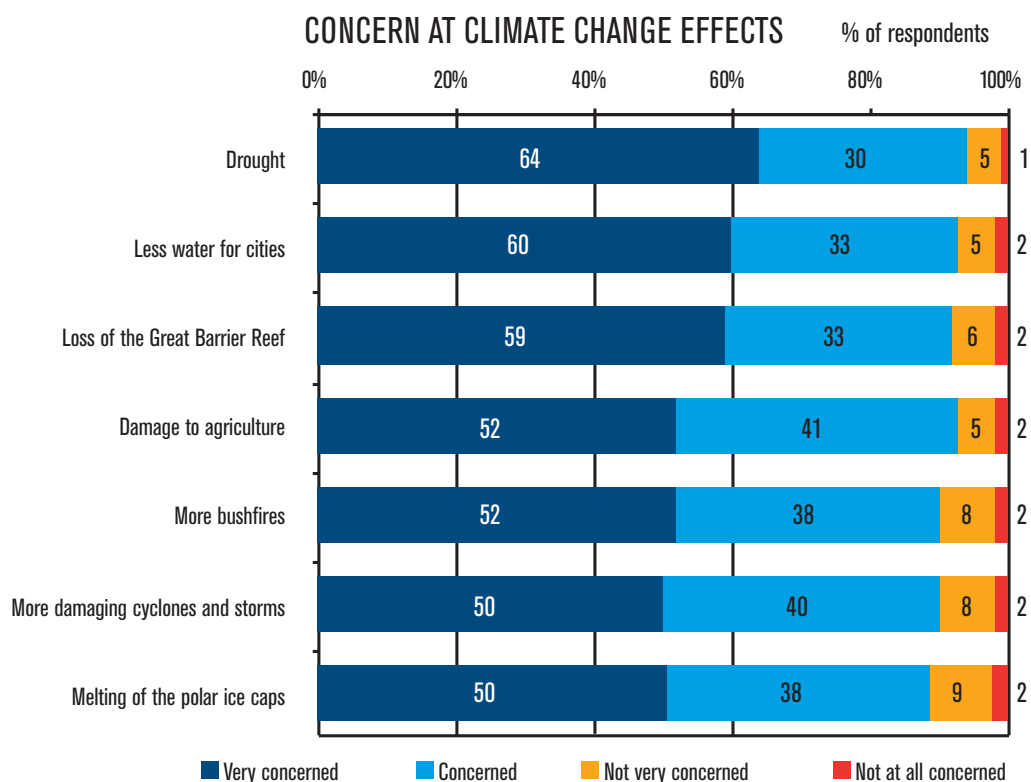


An overwhelming majority of Australians are likely to take personal action on a number of fronts to help reduce climate change in the next 12 months.

More efficient use of energy is the most common activity that people believe they will undertake.

- Nine out of 10 (91 per cent) of Australians are very likely or likely to install more efficient lighting. Similarly, 91 per cent intend to use more energy efficient appliances and 86 per cent intend to make their houses more energy efficient.
- Home temperature control is another area in which Australians are likely to take personal action to reduce climate change. 75 per cent of Australians are likely or very likely to reduce home heating and 73 per cent are likely or very likely to reduce home cooling.
- Other actions that are likely to be adopted by the majority of Australians include changing electricity to renewable sources (20 per cent very likely and 44 per cent likely), reduce car use (20 per cent very likely and 43 per cent likely), and boycott heavily polluting companies (19 per cent very likely and 42 per cent likely).

Level of concern at potential climate change effects



An overwhelming majority of Australians express concern at a range of specific impacts of climate change that were presented to them. More than 90 per cent feel concerned and only two per cent express no concern at specific impacts. Greatest concern is reserved for drought and the lack of water for cities.

- Australians are most concerned about the impact of climate change on drought (64 per cent very concerned and 30 per cent concerned), and the consequence of less water for cities (60 per cent very concerned and 33 per cent concerned).
- The loss of Australia's iconic Great Barrier Reef is also a strong concern for most people with 59 per cent of Australians very concerned and 33 per cent concerned about this issue.
- There is also strong concern for the damage to agriculture (52 per cent very concerned and 41 per cent concerned), more bushfires (52 per cent very concerned and 38 per cent concerned), more damaging cyclones and storms (50 per cent very concerned and 40 per cent concerned).

2007 Federal Election

The 2007 Federal Election has been described as the world's first 'climate changed' election.

Climate change became a key differentiating factor between the main political parties. Auspoll exit polling demonstrated that climate change was the third most important distinguishing policy between the major parties at the recent election. Just under half (46 per cent) of all voters believed that it represented a large difference between the parties and a further 31 per cent believed there was a small difference between the parties on climate change policy. Other key findings included:

- More than half of the voters surveyed (53 per cent) identified climate change as one of the top five issues that determined their vote at the last election. Almost one in 10 (9 per cent) rated it as their most important issue.
- A different trend emerges when data is restricted to only those who gave their first preference to Labor with climate change being given greater overall importance.
- Two thirds of these voters (66 per cent) identified climate change as one of their top 5 issues while 8 per cent nominated it as their top issue. The top issue for these voters was industrial relations (28 per cent).

Climate change was seen as representing a greater difference than: the economy; education; health; interest rates; or national security. For ALP voters, climate change was one of the two issues which most clearly distinguished the policy positions of the major parties.

Further findings included:

- The only two issues which reflected a greater difference between the parties were industrial relations (74 per cent saw a 'large difference') and 'leadership' (57 per cent).
- When data is restricted to voters who gave their first preference to Labor, climate change became their second most distinguishing policy (60 per cent) behind industrial relations (75 per cent).
- When asked which of the major parties was better at handling climate change, 43 per cent chose the ALP and 16 per cent the Coalition. Some 25 per cent said the parties were 'both the same'.

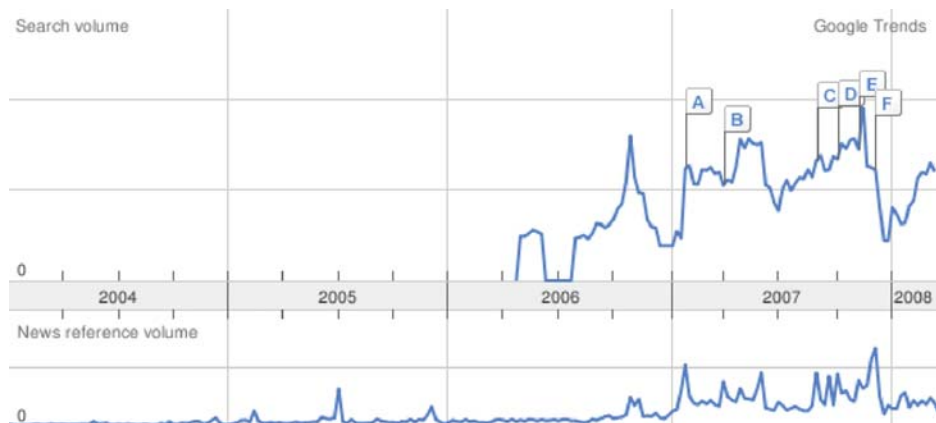
Other findings were perhaps even more illustrative. Findings included:

- Almost eight out of 10 voters (78 per cent) agreed that climate change was important at the election because they wanted to see "a clean energy future for Australia based on renewable energy".

- Some 68 per cent of voters wanted to “see Australia as a leader in action and negotiations on climate change” and some 67 per cent of voters wanted to see their Government doing “something to protect the future for the next generation”.

However, voters were less likely to agree with statements that concentrated on the symbolic elements of climate change – like Kevin Rudd being a man of the future (20 per cent strongly agreed) or John Howard being a man of the past (25 per cent strongly agree).

The remarkable surge in interest over these matters is graphically depicted in online searches of ‘climate change’ during this period.



CLIMATE OF THE NATION

About this report

The Climate Institute has commissioned both qualitative and quantitative market research on the attitudes of the Australian community to climate change and climate change solutions since early 2007.

This paper summarises research by Auspoll (formerly the Australian Research Group) and draws on broader market research on public opinion on climate change.

The data discussed in this report was primarily obtained using a sample of 1,005 interviews conducted online between Friday 7 March and Tuesday 11 March 2008.

Interviews were conducted online with Australian residents aged 18 and above. Sample selection took place in such a way as to produce a sample roughly proportional with the population distribution. Data was weighted by age, sex and location to ensure representativeness.

Further, qualitative research was gathered from various focus groups in 2007 and most recently conducted by Auspoll on behalf of The Climate Institute in Sydney (Hurstville and Parramatta) and Brisbane on 11, 12 and 18 March respectively.

Further data was collected from the following sources:

- Surveys conducted by Auspoll on behalf of The Climate Institute online using a representative sample of 1,215 Australians from Tuesday 4 March to Thursday 6 March 2008. Similar polls in March, August and November 2007.
- Exit poll conducted by Auspoll on behalf of The Climate Institute during the 2007 Federal election in eight key marginal seats in New South Wales (Bennelong, Wentworth, Lindsay, Eden Monaro), Queensland (Petrie, Bowman) and South Australia (Makin, Sturt). The poll was conducted online using a representative sample of 984 voters and was conducted from 6pm on Saturday 24 November until Tuesday 27 November.
- Published polls drawn from an array of sources, including the CSIRO, the Lowy Institute, Newspoll, AC Nielsen, Galaxy Polls, Google Trends and telephone polls conducted by Winston Sustainable Research Strategies

This report marks the second of the Climate Institute's annual updates on public attitudes to climate change and climate change solutions.

Established in late 2005 **The Climate Institute** is a non-partisan, independent research organisation that works with community, business and governments to drive climate change solutions. The Climate Institute is primarily funded by a donation from the Poola Foundation (Tom Kantor Fund).
www.climateinstitute.org.au
