

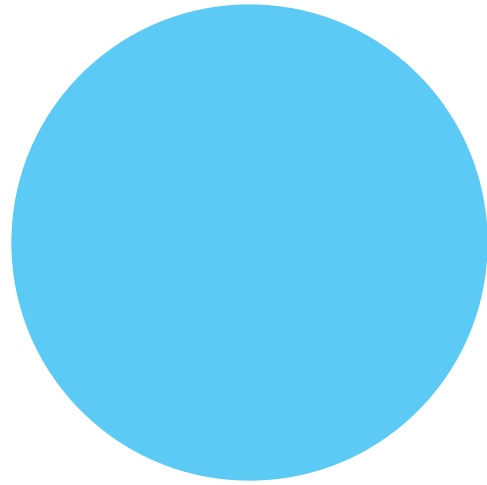


The Climate Institute

Climate of the Nation 2013
Australian attitudes on climate change

Now more than ever, we need your help to build public awareness and support for climate and carbon action and hold our political parties to account. Support our Carbon Crunch Appeal and help ensure Australia's zero-carbon future.

www.climateinstitute.org.au/support



This report captures the pulse of the nation on climate change, its impacts and solutions in 2013. It showcases shifts in views and concerns from *Climate of the Nation 2012*, released a year ago.

The report is based on nationally-representative qualitative and quantitative analysis.

The lead author for this report is Kristina Stefanova, Communications Director of The Climate Institute, with contributions from other staff and using research from JWS Research.

Key imagery in this report, including the cover, has been photographed by Michael Hall, Creative Fellow at The Climate Institute.

Climate of the Nation 2013 and associated video content can be accessed at www.climateinstitute.org.au.

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Climate of the Nation 2013

Australian attitudes on climate change

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Why we do this

Foreword

The Climate Institute has been measuring the ebbs and flows of Australian attitudes to climate change and its solutions through its *Climate of the Nation* research and reports since 2007.

Attitudes peaked around 2007 when the Millennium Drought impacted water supplies in capital cities and when bush fires threatened the regions. Businesses were vocal in their support of an ambitious carbon price. With a wave of international concern, Prime Minister John Howard described it as the perfect storm for climate action.

Subsequent research measured developments, such as when bipartisan support for emissions trading shattered in late 2009. We tracked declining support for action as climate change plunged into partisan and ideological divides. *Climate of the Nation* has also tracked concerns and confusion about the science as the pre-Copenhagen “climate-gate” hit the front pages of newspapers and the later rebuttals were relegated to small sections on the back pages.

In 2010, our exit polling indicated that a third of those who voted Green may have voted for Labor if it were not for the abandonment of the emission trading scheme, a result that could have changed the outcome of the Federal election. But history was set, and a remarkable compact was negotiated between the Independents, Greens and ALP Government.

This triangulation of policy making – with the fear mongering and rent seeking that accompanied it – witnessed further declines in support for climate action and policy solutions as well as ongoing uncertainty about the science.

Climate of the Nation 2013 marks a potential turning point in this debate and in this regard reflects other recent polls. It reveals that a remarkably consistent two-thirds of Australians accept that climate change is real. It also reveals diminishing confusion and a growing understanding that climate impacts are occurring now, no longer just threats for the future.

Significantly, the research has found rebounding support for Australian leadership on climate solutions. That number climbed for the first time since 2007.

The research clearly shows that there is no foundation for claims that the forthcoming election is a “referendum on the carbon tax”. Australians sense the opportunity in taking action and there is an emerging sentiment that supports giving carbon pricing a go. There was concern about the perceived “carbon tax lie”, but this will be less of a factor with the change in Prime Minister.

The next 12 months will determine the future of historic laws, which have some businesses starting to pay for their carbon pollution and that limits the level of pollution for over 60 per cent of the economy. We will see if we can build on renewable energy laws and whether Australia can actively support global action, which is in our national climate interest.

Climate of the Nation 2013 gives fascinating insights into some frustrating and some positive trends that have led us to where we are today. With the help of our supporters, we hope to continue the tradition of capturing Australia’s pulse on climate change in the years to come.

John Connor, CEO
The Climate Institute

Aim + Approach

Who

The Climate Institute engaged JWS Research to undertake the qualitative and quantitative analysis that underpins *Climate of the Nation 2013*. We are particularly thankful to John Scales, Jessica Lai and Mark Zuker for their work on this research.

The Institute would like to extend special thanks to volunteers Jie Li and Shreejay Shah, as well as staff members Corey Watts and Garrett Stringer, for their assistance in filming the vox pop videos for this report.

How

Qualitative

The qualitative research element was carried out by JWS Research, who ran mixed focus groups in September 2012, and February and May 2013. Participants were recruited from diverse locations, ranging from inner metropolitan and regional areas to coal and resource dependent areas.

Quantitative

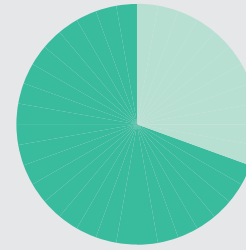
The quantitative research element was carried out between 1-7 June, through an online survey of 1,009 Australians. Respondents were drawn from the I-view online panel. The data collected was then weighted according to the ABS 2006 Census data for location, gender and age.

Other

We also conducted a few short interviews throughout NSW and filmed ‘word on the street’ segments in Sydney. These interviews were conducted to get a fuller picture of how climate change is interpreted and addressed in our daily lives.

These videos are available online at www.climateinstitute.org.au

Caution is advised in relation to some of the comparisons made between 2012 and 2013 results due to the category ‘Don’t know’ not being available as an option for some questions in 2012. Please contact The Climate Institute with any questions or for further clarification.



ONLY AROUND A THIRD OF AUSTRALIANS THINK THAT THE CARBON LAWS SHOULD BE REPEALED AND MORE OPPOSE A DOUBLE DISSOLUTION TO GET RID OF THEM THAN SUPPORT ONE.

Executive summary

Since 2007, The Climate Institute has conducted comprehensive research into Australian attitudes to climate change and related policies. We have published a number of *Climate of the Nation* reports tracking attitudes and actions as they have evolved. This year's report builds off a quantitative poll conducted in early June and rolling qualitative research over the last 12 months.

The 2012 research was conducted in the heat of the toxic and speculative debate leading up to the introduction of the carbon laws.

A year later we find that two-thirds of Australians think that climate change is occurring and almost all of them believe that it is impacting Australia now. People are genuinely worried about the cost impacts of extreme weather and climate change on everyday concerns such as crop production and food supply, insurance premiums, water shortages and climate refugees.

Climate change is not perceived as a major issue in this election, but it is also clear that there is no basis from which to call the election a "referendum on the carbon tax".

Only around a third of Australians think that the carbon laws should be repealed and more oppose a double dissolution to get rid of them than support one. The "carbon tax" itself is not a major reason for supporting a Coalition vote. "Economic mismanagement", "lies and incompetence" and the "carbon tax lie" are cited as far stronger reasons.

Opposition to carbon pricing is dropping. While support remains soft, it strengthens significantly when the policy is explained. This matches the findings of other recent polls.

A year into the laws, there is evidence that Australians do not believe that carbon pricing has been as financially detrimental as they anticipated. This holds true at both the household and national level. While a smaller majority still think they are worse off, those that think they are much worse off has dropped significantly.

Overall, cynicism and confusion about carbon pricing is still dominant. But it is decreasing, perhaps because of some recognition of declining national emissions and increased renewable energy investment since the start of the laws.

Today, more people want to give carbon pricing a go than get rid of it. Indeed, more Australians want greater action and leadership than in recent years. This is a departure from a year ago, when *Climate of the Nation 2012* found an electorate that was largely fatigued with the politics of climate change and scared about the rising costs of living.

This year the number of those agreeing that Australia should be a world leader in finding solutions to climate change is significantly higher, and in fact higher than in April 2010, immediately prior to the deferral of emissions trading legislation. Despite the toxic politics, 60 per cent still think the Federal Government should be playing a leading role.

Only 6-8 per cent of Australians believe that local, state or federal government should take no action.

Strong majorities recognise that doing nothing on climate change will increase the risks and that there are economic opportunities in acting in areas like renewable energy. Significantly, appreciation of the economic benefits and jobs associated with a strong renewable energy industry is not contingent on acceptance of climate change, or even that humans are responsible for it.

Despite some attacks on renewable energy, wind in particular, there is overwhelming support for renewables. That enthusiasm is high across ALP, Green and Coalition voters. Support this year is even stronger for wind and solar as preferred energy sources. Support for both nuclear and coal has declined, while Australians remain divided over gas.

Results from the focus groups and national poll behind *Climate of the Nation 2013* indicate a clear acceptance that climate change is happening and that humans are contributing to it. Twice as many trust the science than don't.

There remains confusion about carbon pricing, however, and most Australians still believe that there are too many conflicting claims amongst scientists for the public to be certain. This is despite the fact that 97 per cent of published climate research accepts the science¹. Almost as many think the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated as do not.

Notwithstanding these differences of opinion, the underlying call for climate action is relatively resilient. It may grow stronger after the election, with the issue of the "carbon tax lie" resolved along with an emerging understanding of reduced emissions, increasing renewable energy investment and growing international carbon and clean energy policies.

Key findings

87%

of people who think that climate change is occurring believe humans bear at least some responsibility for it (32% think that humans are the main cause).

87%

of people who think that climate change is occurring believe that Australia is feeling the impacts of climate change today.

87%

of people place solar energy in their top three choices for energy sources; 67% have wind in their top three.

71%

agree that tackling climate change creates new jobs and investment in clean energy; 64% of Coalition voters agreed.

66%

of people think that climate change is occurring.

26%

think Labor has an effective climate plan; 19% think the Coalition does.

37%

agree the Coalition should repeal carbon pricing laws.

43%

prefer not to have a double dissolution election in the event that the Coalition cannot get the carbon pricing laws abolished; 34% would support a double dissolution.

58%

of people think Australia should be a leader in finding solutions to climate change; up 6% from 2012 and on the rise for the first time since 2008 when 76% said they want Australia to lead in reducing pollution and in changing to cleaner, smarter energy.

60%

think that there are too many conflicting opinions for the public to be sure about climate change (down 6% from last year).



Attitudes

HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND CLIMATE CHANGE?

Reading or listening to popular media, one could easily be left with the impression that most Australians have bought into denial theories and reject the climate science. Results from public polling and focus groups, however, are in contrast to this. The reality is that two-thirds of Australians continue to agree that climate change is occurring, with 87 per cent of those thinking that humans are at least partly responsible. A majority remain concerned about climate change, with higher concerns about particular impacts of climate change.

Many Australians understand that climate change is affecting Australia now, and will impose significant costs in the future. There are signs that recent extreme weather events in Australia and abroad – especially “Superstorm” Sandy in New York – have helped raise awareness about the reality of climate change.

In the United States, such events have led to a rise in the number of Americans, especially Republicans, who accept that climate change is happening and think that humans are at least in part to blame for it.² These shifting public attitudes have now made it easier for politicians to speak up about climate change. President Barack Obama has since made public comments connecting the dots between extreme weather and climate change³, and more recently introduced a package of regulatory measures to address it.⁴

In Australia, among Coalition voters who believe climate change is occurring, only 24 per cent believe that humans are mainly responsible. Awareness is significantly higher among ALP voters (38 per cent) and Greens (55 per cent).

The overall average of Australians who hold this view is 32 percent.

Overall, younger Australians are those most likely to say that climate change is at least in part caused by humans.

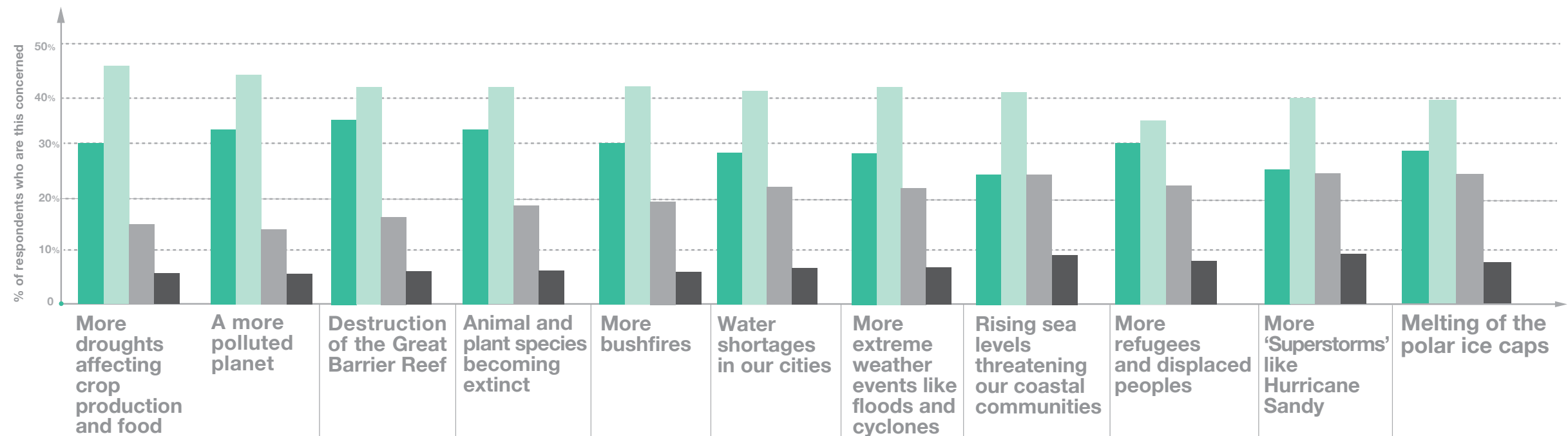
There is lingering confusion about the science and causes of climate change. For instance, some 39 per cent still think that climate change is exaggerated (34 per cent do not). Yet at the same time, twice as many Australians (46 per cent) trust the science that suggests the climate is changing due to human activities as those who don't (23 per cent).

Concerns

WHAT CONCERNS US MOST ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE?

FIGURE 2

- Very concerned
- Fairly concerned
- Not very concerned
- Not at all concerned



In focus groups across the country, regardless of whether people agreed with the existence of man-made climate change or attribute it to natural weather cycles, there was broad agreement that increased industrialisation and consumerism are having a detrimental effect on the planet. Australians worry that these consequences could result in a decreased quality of life, particularly for future generations.

It is interesting to note that climate change is no longer considered a future issue. A majority of Australians feel that climate change is impacting their nation already. And a majority (57 per cent) continue to think that climate change poses a serious threat to our way of life over the coming decades⁶.

In the annual Lowy poll⁷, a similar question was asked in 2012 and 2013. This year, 46 per cent of Australians agreed that "Global warming is a serious and pressing problem. We should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs."

That is up from 36 per cent in 2012, confirming a trend around increased appetite for ambition and action on climate change. *Climate of the Nation 2013* finds key concerns around increased pollution, food security, the destruction of natural heritage icons such as the Great Barrier Reef, more extreme weather events, and water shortages, among others (see Figure 2).

Two-thirds are worried about the potential of climate change to create climate refugees, an issue of particular concern to Coalition voters.

Given Asia's exposure to extreme weather and sea level rise, large-scale population displacement in the region is a growing risk. For instance in the Philippines, 85 per cent of people polled by the nation's Social Weather Station⁸, claimed to have "personally experienced" climate change impacts in the last three years, with half rating the experience as moderate to severe.



+ People understand that what they do matters: 47 per cent feel that the things they do on a daily basis contribute to climate change. At the same time 53 per cent feel that their daily actions can help address climate change.

+ In focus groups across the nation Australians indicated that obvious events with severe consequences would be a significant trigger for immediate action on climate change. This explains why a concern about more frequent storms such as "Superstorm" Sandy is high on the list of worries for most people, with countless vivid images of destruction and sorrow fresh in people's minds.

+ Sandy appears to have made more of an impression than Australia's own recent extreme weather. The Queensland floods of the past three years, the bushfires in Victoria and Tasmania, even the broken heat records of summer 2013 are seen by many as natural variability in Australia's weather. "We live in the land of floods and fires, it's more normal for us," in the words of one focus group participant.

NEW YORK, NY
November 2012:
The devastation of Superstorm Sandy is evident in this photo: an American flag flies from a burned house in Breezy Point, Queens Borough, NY.

Image: Anton Oparin / Shutterstock.com

Solutions

HOW DO WE FEEL ABOUT CARBON PRICING?

For most Australians climate change is a real and tangible concern that exists irrespective of their opinions on carbon pricing. While support for carbon pricing is not strong, opposition has diminished significantly. There is a willingness to give the carbon price a chance to prove itself.

Several reasons account for the fall in opposition. Once the carbon laws were in operation, the impact on prices across the economy was minimal. This revealed that predictions of economic destruction and price shocks were hyperbolic and inaccurate. Interestingly, even the official forecasts overstated the real impact of the carbon price.⁹ News of the emergence of emissions trading schemes in China may also have helped.

Support remains soft, however, and the policy is generally as misunderstood as it was a year ago, despite or because of the Government's advertising campaign and various inflated scare campaigns. Australians have come to view carbon pricing mostly as a political tool rather than an actual policy with impacts on daily life.

The proportion of Australians who strongly disagree with the statement "I support the carbon pricing laws" has dropped to 20 per cent, down from 30 per cent in 2012, but only 28 per cent agree with the statement.

Support improves if carbon pricing is explained. A majority (51 per cent) "would support carbon pricing if all the money raised goes to support low and middle income households and Australian businesses and renewable energy investment." That is up from 47 per cent last year.

An overall 64 per cent indicate stronger support for carbon pricing if they could see more direct benefits, such as investment in renewable energy and reduced carbon emissions.

But while people are lukewarm on carbon pricing, they have a stronger desire to see action on climate change than in recent years, in part driven by the fact that they have heard so much about carbon pricing.

In many focus groups, people spoke about having gained a greater understanding about incentivising individuals and business to reduce their electricity use through the debate around the carbon tax. In principle at least, then, if not in practice, carbon pricing is seen as a potential method of reducing pollution and encouraging investment in clean energy.

Today, despite the toxic politics, more Australians think that having carbon pricing is better than not taking action (42 per cent), compared to those (26 per cent) who disagree.

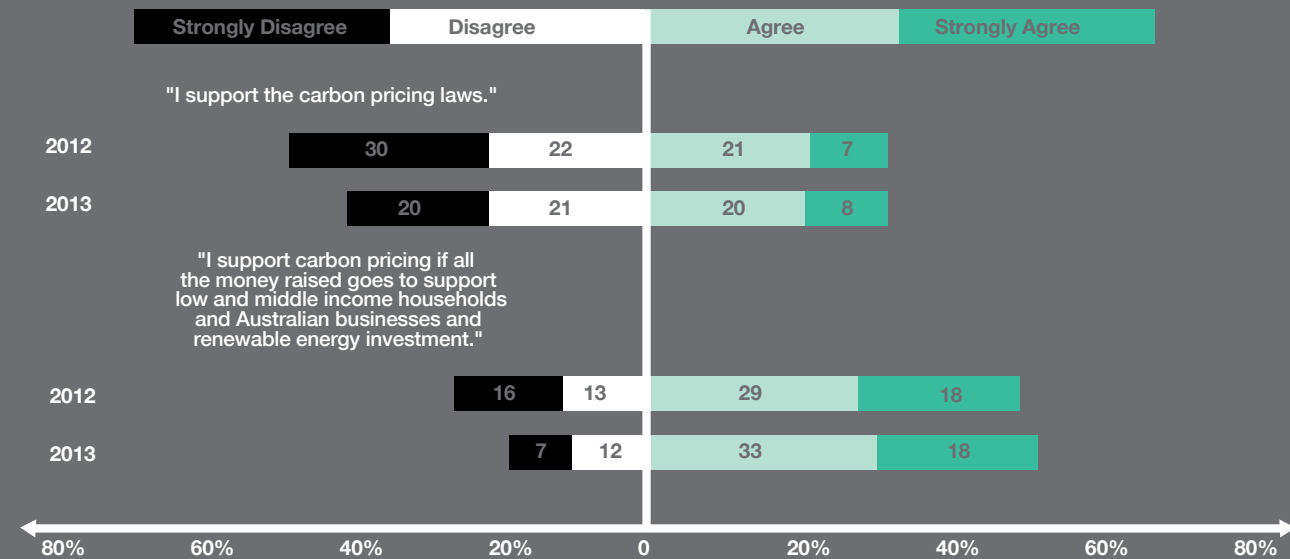
Most importantly, while people's focus on national and household level economic impacts remains, when it comes to climate change, that worry is shifting more towards the costs of inaction, rather than action.

On the eve of the laws' introduction, 61 per cent of Australians agreed that carbon pricing would have a negative impact on the Australian economy, with 27 per cent in strong agreement. Today, only 45 per cent agree that carbon pricing would have a negative impact, with only 15 per cent in strong agreement.

Although still a majority, fewer households today believe they are worse off than they thought they would be before the carbon price came into effect. In 2012, 65 per cent of households thought they would be worse off; today that percentage is down to 53 per cent.

FIGURE 3

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT CARBON PRICING?



WHY POLLS ON CARBON PRICING DIFFER

Poll after poll in the past year has shown continued soft support for carbon pricing, moving up a percentage or two at a time, while opposition is dropping off at twice the rate.

Partly this has to do with when the polls were conducted and their structure. Older polls tend to show higher opposition and less support, with a divergence on those views emerging in more recent polls.¹⁰

Short polls that ask a support or repeal question out of context are more likely to find high opposition.

Longer polling questions that detail how the price works and where the money goes receive higher support and lower opposition numbers.

Some polls ask about two or more concepts at the same time, which can add to confusion or opposition¹¹.



Business views

BUSINESS VIEWS ARE EVEN MORE ENTRENCHED IN FAVOUR OF A CARBON PRICE THAN THOSE OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

“A carbon price with cost effective complementary measures is critical to reducing Australia’s emissions.”

AECOM National Business Survey

- + A national survey* covering a broad range of sectors, including liable entities, found that 99 per cent of respondents agreed that Australia should aim to reduce its carbon emissions, with 87 per cent saying they strongly agreed.
- + When asked whether they supported a price-based mechanism to reduce carbon emissions, 65 per cent of respondents indicated support for an emissions trading scheme with a floating price, while a carbon tax with a fixed price was supported by 29 per cent.
- + Only 3 per cent of businesses did not support any form of carbon pricing, while another 3 per cent were unsure.

99

1

*The survey was conducted by AECOM and commissioned by Businesses for a Clean Economy.

AUSTRALIANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BELIEVE THAT LABOR (26 PER CENT) HAS AN EFFECTIVE PLAN FOR TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE THAN THE COALITION (19 PER CENT).

Should carbon pricing stay or go?

Only a third (37 per cent) of Australians believe that the Coalition should repeal carbon pricing if it is elected to government at the next Federal election. That is down from 48 per cent in an Ipsos poll of late May 2012.

Furthermore, there is no mandate for a double dissolution if the Coalition fails to get the carbon laws abolished, with considerably more people against a double dissolution election (43 per cent) than for one (34 per cent).

More Australians (46 per cent) want to keep some form of carbon pricing or trading scheme than scrap it, even if the Coalition is elected to government. That is more than the 36 per cent who favour abolishing carbon pricing or replacing it with the Coalition’s Direct Action Plan.

When it comes to the carbon laws, the message appears to be that Australians just want to move on. A significant portion (43 per cent) think that now that carbon pricing has been introduced, it should be given a chance to work for at least a few years.

More Australians agree than disagree that neither Labor nor the Coalition’s position on carbon pricing and climate change make a difference to their vote. This is in direct disagreement with the often voiced views of the Coalition that if elected to government they would have a mandate to repeal carbon pricing. In fact, in a list of reasons for not voting Labor in the Federal election, “Julia Gillard’s carbon tax lie” rated higher than “the carbon tax” (19 per cent and 13 per cent respectively) showing a greater concern about the process than the policy. Coalition voters are much more worried about economic mismanagement (mentioned by 37 per cent) and lies

and broken promises generally (33 per cent). Business views are even more entrenched in favour of keeping carbon pricing (see opposite page).¹¹

Cynicism runs deep

Voters’ cynicism runs deep in all directions. People are unsure if the carbon laws are doing anything for the environment or to reduce emissions. They suspect that many businesses have used carbon pricing as an excuse to increase their prices. And they do not accept that prices would decrease if the carbon pricing legislation was to be repealed – only 24 per cent of Australians agree that if carbon pricing is repealed electricity prices will go back to where they were before the laws.

Others expressed concern that by dismantling carbon pricing, Australia may potentially lose its competitiveness. In the poll, about a third (31 per cent) agreed that repealing carbon pricing now could mean that Australia loses the opportunity to get ahead of other countries in the development of smarter and cleaner technologies.

Overall, Australians are more likely to believe that Labor (26 per cent) has an effective plan for tackling climate change than the Coalition (19 per cent). But Australians are unconvinced by the plans of either major political parties; around half neither agree nor disagree that either party has an effective plan, or are uncertain.

Solutions

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR FUTURE TO LOOK LIKE?

FIGURE 4

MOST PREFERRED ENERGY SOURCE

1. Solar	87%
2. Wind	67%
3. Hydro (Dams)	46%
4. Gas	28%
5. Tidal/Wave	24%
6. Geothermal	24%
7. Nuclear	13%
8. Coal	12%

More than ever, Australians believe that the country can be more ambitious about reducing carbon emissions and in 2013 more believe that more ambitious carbon emission reductions are possible.

Australians increasingly link climate change action to job creation in the clean energy industry and rising investment in domestic industry generally. Those efforts are seen as having the double benefit of tackling climate change and improving Australia's economic standing, at the macro and household levels.

Just under two-thirds of Australians (63 per cent) think that responding to climate change presents a unique economic opportunity for the development and sale of renewable energy technology.

More than two-thirds (71 per cent) see new jobs and investment in clean energy resulting from Australia acting on climate change. Significantly, 64 per cent of Coalition voters share this sense.

For the majority of Australians, the key solution to climate change is to shift away from fossil fuels and transition to a clean, renewable energy future. In focus groups, even the staunchest climate deniers, or those who want carbon pricing repealed at all cost, rally to the idea of an Australia powered by solar, wind or hydro.

These three energy types top this year's ideal energy mix, by an even higher margin than last year. Support for wind has jumped the most, from 59 to 67 per cent.

Coal and nuclear remain the least popular energy sources. Nuclear has dropped as a top three preferred energy source from 20 per cent in 2012 to 13 per cent in 2013 (see Figure 4 on ideal energy mix).

Further evidence of the enduring enthusiasm for renewable energy is in the strong support for a high Renewable Energy Target (RET), a policy that, as explained to national poll participants, requires energy companies by 2020 to purchase 20 per cent of consumer power demand from renewable sources. About a third felt that 20 per cent is about right, while 40 per cent felt the target should be set higher.





Doing my bit

PUTTING THE 'I' IN CLIMATE CHANGE

Australians look to governments and business for leadership on climate change (see Figure 5, page 32) but they also believe that the response to climate change starts at home. Their views on what constitutes effective personal action are largely unchanged from last year.

As discovered in *Climate of the Nation 2012*, the experience of water shortages during the Millennium Drought taught people to conserve water – a behavioural lesson learned that is now being carried over to saving energy¹².

Emissions from energy use fell by nearly 9 million tonnes of pollution, a 7 per cent drop between March 2012 and 2013¹³. While a number of drivers are at work, a key one is that people have become more cost conscious and seek more energy efficient appliances.

Australians feel a personal responsibility - “doing my bit” - when it comes to contributing to climate change action, with a steady 65 per cent saying that they believe that individuals can contribute to addressing climate change. This sense of personal responsibility is present despite the fact that only one in two of Australians agree that their daily actions can help to address climate change.

In terms of the most effective personal actions, Australians rank planting trees and insulating their homes as the most effective. These actions were followed in popularity by installing solar panels and recycling.

Asked why any of those actions are important to them, people cite concern for cost savings, reducing pollution, improving health and more broadly their family’s quality of life.

While participants talked extensively about the actions they can take, they also raised concerns about those actions being futile if government and business don’t also play their part.

That said, people hold firm to an individual responsibility to act on climate change even when prompted with the prospect of catastrophic climate change caused by unavoidable natural events and the inevitable futility of personal actions against the potential magnitude of such events.

Voice of the people

In June, photographer Michael Hall asked people around Sydney and rural NSW what they think about climate change and how they would address the problem.

Here is what they said.



GRANT IRVING, BYRON BAY

What causes climate change?

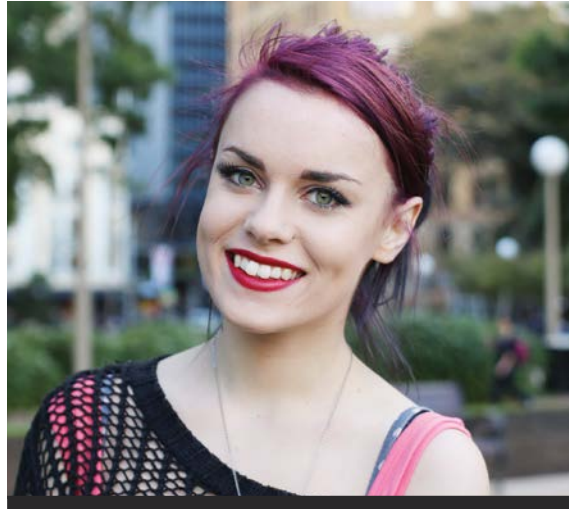
Humans.

What would you do if you had the power to mitigate climate change?

Stop creating plastics.

What are your views on the carbon tax?

I like the carbon tax because I think it's gonna have to keep them ... responsible for what they do. And if the carbon tax is gonna stop them from making stuff [that pollutes], then that's good.



SIOBHAN JAMISON, SYDNEY

What causes climate change?

It's an issue namely because of society's way of using things and putting them away ... all that stuff going to waste ... so I think it's us to blame.

What would you do if you had the power to mitigate climate change?

If I were in charge I'd have more changes, like better public transport and those kinds of things. More recycling. Less products using plastic, get rid of it ... keep it all nice and clean.

What are your views on the carbon tax?

I really don't know that much about it ... They are giving us small options to say that they are doing something, but they are really not doing enough with how much climate change is happening. So they need to do more.



GARY DUNN, URALLA

What causes climate change?

A combination of deforestation, probably a fair bit. But it has to do a lot with the burning of coal and other fuels.

What would you do if you had the power to mitigate climate change?

We need the whole world to cooperate. We can't have China building coal power stations and everything and sending Australia broke and closing everything down, because we can't burn any fuels here. So we have to get everyone worldwide to comply.

What are your views on the carbon tax?

I think there are other ways to tax. The carbon tax hasn't helped at all.



KSENIYA TOTOEVA, ERSKINEVILLE

What causes climate change?

I have great respect for science and trust what scientists tell me. And as far as I understand it, a vast majority of scientists tell me that humans are responsible for climate change.

What would you do if you had the power to mitigate climate change?

I would really love to see more guided consultation to at least get people back on the same page again, to not have the issue be so polarising ... I feel that there should be as much money invested in the actual science and learning how we should tackle it as it is in how we explain climate change to people.

What are your views on the carbon tax?

It's something that I feel is worthwhile. It's allowing us to make the transition towards a greener energy future.



Demographics

Is it wisdom or the growing pessimism of old age? Whatever the driver, there are some statistically significant distinctions between some views held by younger and older Australians. There are also differences in opinion between men and women, and divisions between city and rural Australians.

Mostly the divisions across all demographics are between belief in climate change, trust in the science and concern about impacts, as well as in attitudes in a certain direction towards carbon pricing. The likelihood of voters casting a ballot in a certain direction is also impacted among age groups and sexes.

- + Younger people are most likely to believe that humans are the main cause of climate change. More than a third (38 per cent) hold this view, compared to 33 per cent among 35-54 year olds and only about a quarter (26 per cent) among 55+ year olds.
- + Australians aged 35 to 54 years are most likely to agree that they trust climate science (49 per cent) compared to 42 per cent of older people and 48 per cent of youth.
- + Youth are most likely to say that climate change poses a serious threat to our way of life over the coming decade, with 63 per cent of this view, compared to 56 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds and 53 per cent of older Australians. Some 62 per cent worry about the economic impacts of extreme weather events, compared to 59 per cent of Middle age Australians and 56 per cent of older Australians.
- + Younger people want to see their nation lead, with 66 per cent of youth expressing this view, compared to 57 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds and 51 per cent of older people. They are also more optimistic about Australia's ability to influence other countries to tackle climate change. Some 64 per cent hold this view, compared to 56 per cent of those 35 and older.
- + Younger people are much more likely to think that their daily actions contribute to climate change. A majority (54 per cent) hold this view, compared to 46 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds and only 40 per cent of older Australians. At the same time, they are least likely to think that personal action can help address climate change. Youth's preferred effective action is an international agreement, like the Kyoto Protocol, to reduce global emissions. The youngest Australians gave international action an effectiveness score of 6.4 out of 10. Australians over the age of 35 ranked it at 6 out of 10.
- + Younger Australians are most likely to believe that the renewable energy target (RET) of 20 per cent should be higher (43 per cent compared to 41 per cent among 35 to 54 year olds and 35 per cent among 55+ year olds). They are also most likely to agree that a 25 per cent reduction in Australia's carbon emissions by 2020 is affordable and achievable. A majority (51 per cent) hold this view, compared to about 43 per cent among those over 35.
- + Attitudes towards carbon pricing are most positive among young Australians, who are more likely to think it effective in reducing emissions and having a positive impact on the environment. A majority (54 per cent) also think the government should be doing more to address climate change, followed closely by those aged 35-54 (53 per cent) but significantly more than the 48 per cent of older Australians who share the view.

OLD / YOUNG

- + Older people are most likely to believe that the Coalition will repeal carbon pricing if elected to government at the next Federal election (42 per cent compared to about 33 per cent of all younger people). They are also most likely to agree that they should abolish carbon pricing altogether, as they have promised. A third hold this view, compared to 27 per cent of middle aged Australians and 22 per cent of youth.
- + Yet older Australians are the least keen to see a double dissolution to get carbon pricing abolished. Half disagree with a double dissolution compared to 35 per cent of youth and 43 per cent of those aged 35-54.
- + Older people are more likely to support carbon pricing if they knew that many other countries were introducing carbon taxes or emissions trading schemes, including major emitters like China (59 per cent vs 51 per cent of youth and 48 per cent of older Australians). Support also improves if they knew that other countries such as China, India and the United States were taking more action (60 per cent compared to about 50 per cent of those under 55).
- + Older Australians are also most likely to think that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated, with 45 per cent of this view. That is higher than the 34 per cent who hold this view among 18 to 34 year olds and 40 per cent among middle aged Australians.
- + Older Australians are the most likely group to think that there are too many conflicting opinions for the public to be sure about claims made around climate change, at 66 per cent. At 56 per cent, youth are ten percent less likely to hold this view.
- + The main climate related concerns for older people are the potential of refugees and displaced peoples as an impact of climate change. Some 71 per cent worry about this, higher than the average of 64 per cent among all those under 55 years of age.
- + Perhaps reflecting the general optimism of youth, while younger Australians are more likely to say they will vote for Labor due to their position on climate change and carbon pricing (20 per cent compared to 13 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds and 16 per cent of older people), they are also the most likely to believe that the Coalition has an effective plan, the Direct Action Plan, to tackle climate change.
- + Older people are more likely to vote for the Liberal-National Coalition due to their position on carbon pricing and climate change. A quarter hold this view, compared to 13 per cent of youth and 17 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds.

he says / she says

- + A similar number of men (65 per cent) and women (66 per cent) agree that climate change is occurring. But men (18 per cent) are more likely than women (12 per cent) to think that climate change is not occurring, while women (22 per cent) are more likely than men (17 per cent) to be unsure.
- + Women are more likely to be concerned about the impact of climate change – from water shortages and a more polluted Australia, to concern that extreme weather events will cause economic impacts for Australia. Some 63 per cent hold this view compared to 55 per cent of men. More women (69 per cent) than men (62 per cent) worry about the impacts of climate change on cost of living rises such as on food and insurance premiums.
- + Men are more likely to believe that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated (45 per cent, compared to 35 per cent of women).
- + Men are more positive towards carbon pricing than women. A third (33 per cent) of men agree with the statement “I support carbon pricing” compared to 23 per cent of women. Men are also more likely to think that carbon pricing is better than taking no action, with 45 per cent of this view compared to 40 per cent of women.
- + Men are also more likely to think that carbon pricing will have a positive impact on the environment, with 38 per cent of men holding this view compared to 30 per cent of women. More men also think that the policy will help reduce Australia’s emissions. Some 39 per cent are of this view, compared to 33 per cent of women.
- + Concern that “if we get rid of carbon pricing, we lose the opportunity to get ahead of other countries in the development of smarter and cleaner technologies” is higher among men (35 per cent) than women (28 per cent).
- + Men (41 per cent) are also more likely than women (33 per cent) to believe that the Coalition should repeal carbon pricing if it is elected to government at the next Federal election. Men are also more likely to be in favour of a double dissolution election to abolish carbon pricing (39 per cent compared to 29 per cent of women).
- + Men (30 per cent) are more likely than women (23 per cent) to agree that Labor has an effective plan to tackle climate change that can achieve at least a 5 per cent cut in Australia’s emissions by 2020. In turn, men (20 per cent) say they are more likely to vote for Labor due to their position than women (12 per cent).

urban / rural



- + Australians living in metropolitan areas (55 per cent) are more likely to be concerned about climate change than those living in regional or rural areas (48 per cent). They are also more likely (59 per cent) to agree that climate change poses a serious threat to our way of life over the coming decades (52 per cent).
- + Half of city dwellers say that they trust the science that suggests the climate is changing due to human activities, compared to just over a third of regional residents (38 per cent).
- + Regional residents are more likely (45 per cent) to say that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated than city dwellers (38 per cent).
- + City dwellers are more likely to think that governments need to do more to address climate change, at 54 per cent compared to 47 per cent of those living in regional areas.
- + Regional and rural residents are most likely to rate solar as their number one preferred energy source (61 per cent compared to 54 per cent of metropolitan residents).
- + Despite a vigorous campaign against wind in the regions, wind is in fact more popular in regional areas (70 per cent) than in cities (65 per cent).

In mid-June, some 40 people around Sydney's CBD and Inner West were randomly asked whether they thought that humans were contributing to climate change. These were their responses.

Videos documenting their views in full can be viewed at www.climateinstitute.org.au



WHAT PORTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE IS DUE TO HUMAN ACTIVITY?



Responsibility

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE, AND IS THEIR PERFORMANCE UP TO PAR?

A global, legally binding effort is seen as the only way in which climate change will ever truly be addressed. Yet the majority of voters believe – despite their perception that Australia is only a minor offender when it comes to emissions – that by virtue of our relative wealth and knowledge, the nation has a responsibility to share our innovative expertise with other countries, particularly developing countries.

These two sentiments explain why the Federal government and international alliances such as the United Nations are identified as the top groups responsible for leading on climate action. Both groups, especially the Federal government, are expected to inspire others to take action.

Research looking at main reasons for government to legislate or regulate¹⁴ identifies “protecting people’s health and safety” as a consistent driver. This would seem to be reflected in the results of this report with a clear desire demonstrated to see government take more leadership on addressing climate change as well as a clear indication that climate change is being understood increasingly as a direct threat to people’s personal security and health.

State, territory and local governments, as well as industry and environmental groups, also have roles in leading on climate action.

In findings that are steady from last year, only environmental groups and local communities were given positive marks for performance this year. The media, industry and state and territory governments received the lowest rankings.

People were asked if they approve or disapprove of how the various listed parties are performing. The net figures give a sense of their stated position.

Government is perceived to be outperforming industry, with only a 6 per cent net disapproval, compared to industry’s -17 per cent. A sceptical, if not cynical, view of media performance on climate change prevails. Last year industry was at -21 and media at -22.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCES SUCH AS THE UNITED NATIONS ARE IDENTIFIED AS THE GROUPS RESPONSIBLE FOR LEADING ON CLIMATE ACTION. BOTH GROUPS, BUT ESPECIALLY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, ARE EXPECTED TO INSPIRE OTHERS TO TAKE ACTION.

FIGURE 5

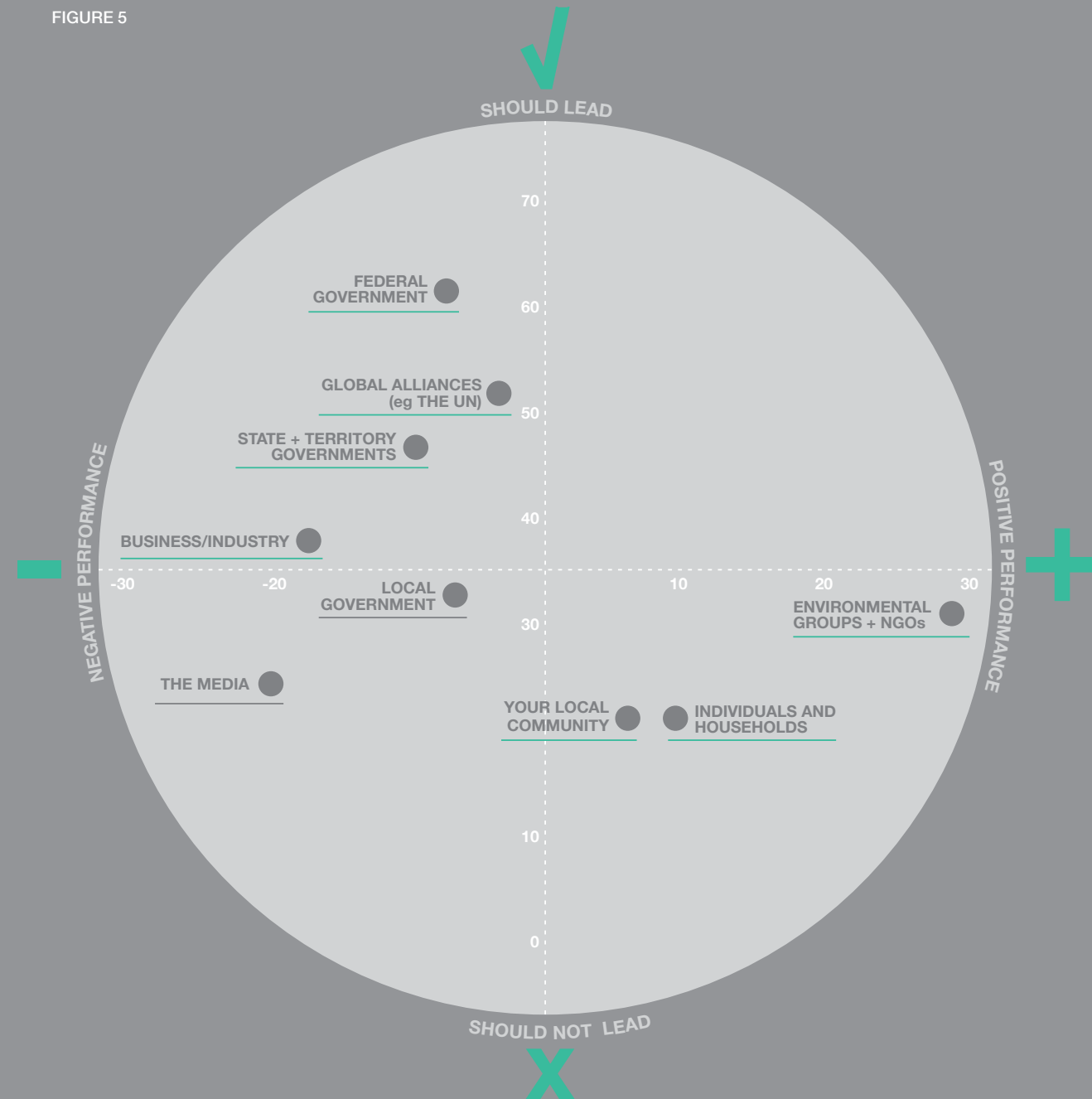


FIGURE 6

These were reasons cited in focus groups by participants, as to why each of these parties should act on climate change.

Individuals

- + PRESSURE BUSINESS VIA PRODUCT CHOICES
- + HARNESS THE POWER OF COMMUNITY
- + LESS CONSUMERISM
- + GREATER USE OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Government (all levels)

- + BE A GLOBAL PARTNER, PUTTING PRESSURE ON INTERNATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND PARTNERING WITH THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY ON A SOLUTION
- + RESPONSIBILITY FOR TARGETS
- + LEAD, REGULATE, INCENTIVISE AND INSPIRE CHANGE IN ALL OTHER GROUPS
- + PROVIDE SUBSIDIES AND GRANTS TO ESTABLISH SIGNIFICANT RENEWABLE ENERGY INVESTMENT AND INNOVATION
- + IMPROVE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

World Community

- + AGREE ON ONE DIRECTION
- + SET TARGETS
- + GLOBAL DISCUSSIONS
- + GLOBAL MONITORING

Industry

- + PROVIDE AFFORDABLE CLEAN OPTIONS (EG ELECTRIC CARS)
- + MAKE SUSTAINABILITY COOL
- + INVEST IN NEW TECHNOLOGY
- + IMPLEMENT SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMS
- + BE PART OF THE CONVERSATION AND SOLUTION

Education

- + SCHOOLS TO EDUCATE OUR FUTURE
- + UNIVERSITIES TO COLLABORATE WITH INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT AND FOCUS THEIR RESEARCH ON HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT
- + IDENTIFY NEW WAYS FORWARD AND TECHNOLOGIES

Media

- + ACT RESPONSIBLY AND SUPPORTIVELY

Leadership

WHO DO WE TRUST AND LOOK UP TO FOR LEADERSHIP?

The presence of too many conflicting views was singled out in the national poll as a key issue around climate change for Australians (see 'Key Findings' section). In focus groups, people talked about their lack of faith in the media to report broader news, rather than mostly stories of political intrigue, an issue that has been persistent for the last decade¹⁵. There is a sense that news about what other countries are doing on climate may not be making Australian airwaves and newspaper pages.

For instance, the argument that Australia shouldn't act on climate change until other major emitters, such as China, do, was frequently made in the lead up to the introduction of carbon laws and featured prominently as a reason for Australia to hold back in various research reports, including *Climate of the Nation 2012*.

Last year, 37 per cent of people felt Australia shouldn't act until other large emitters like China or the US do. This year ambition is stronger, with only 28 per cent of people feeling that Australia shouldn't act until others do.

This year's responses are closer to numbers from February of 2009¹⁶, a time when Australians felt the most passion for addressing climate change.

Further, more people today agree (40 per cent) than disagree (29 per cent) that Australia should be amongst those leading the world in putting a price on carbon. This perhaps is thanks to a number of major organisations such as the World Bank¹⁷ and the OECD¹⁸, who have released research saying that most of the world is moving to carbon pricing and that many other countries have effective carbon prices that are significantly higher than Australia's.

Paradoxically, Australians desire for greater ambition is coming back even as their trust is low that either major political party could deliver an effective plan to achieve significant emission reductions.

Both the Coalition and the Government support a 5 to 25 per cent reductions off 2000 levels by 2020.

Nearly half of Australians (46 per cent) agree that a 25 per cent reduction on Australia's 2000 greenhouse emissions by 2020 is achievable and affordable. That's up from a third (33 per cent) last year.

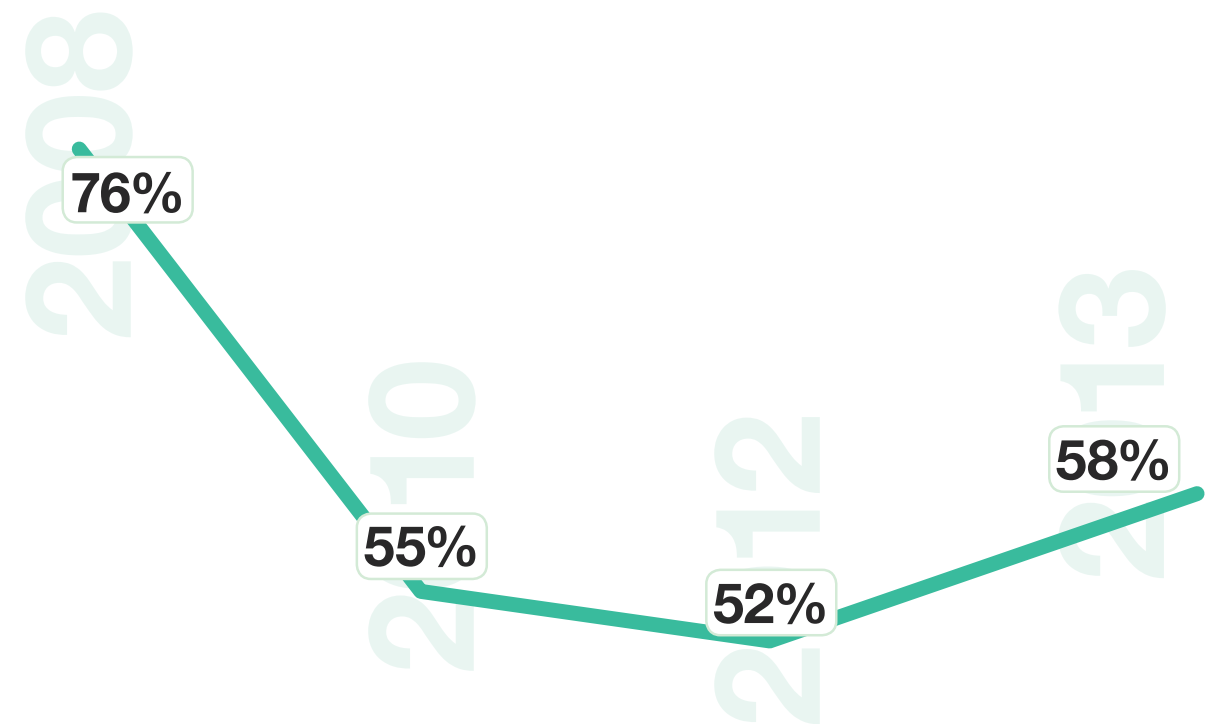
At the same time, significantly more people think that reducing emissions by 5 per cent by 2020 is too low. This year, 45 per cent think that figure is too low, compared to 32 per cent in 2012. At the same time fewer think it's too high, with 9 per cent saying so this year, compared to 17 per cent in 2012.

Both of these findings are perhaps driven by the sense that ignoring climate change is simply not an answer anymore, a view held by 62 per cent of people.

FIGURE 7

Climate of the Nation reports have tried to gauge Australians' desire for the nation to be a world leader since their early days.

PERCENTAGE OF AUSTRALIANS WHO WANT THEIR NATION TO BE A LEADER IN CLIMATE SOLUTIONS



Conclusion

THE CLIMATE CHANGE AND CARBON PRICING JOURNEY

*In the words of John Scales,
Managing Director – Research,
JWS Research*

The last 12 months has been an interesting journey in the climate change and carbon pricing space. Our research has showed there is much confusion, doubt and concern around these issues, which have been gainfully employed by the federal Opposition and others to wage an anti-carbon tax campaign.

Sometimes, it even seemed to voters as if the Government was helping the Opposition in their cause. For example, the Household Assistance Package helped to reinforce a widespread perception amongst voters that the carbon laws are for all intents and purposes “just another tax” - one that would increase consumer cost of living even further.

Household assistance both fuelled the anti-carbon tax campaign and complicated the issue; confusing voters’ understanding and appreciation of the scheme. Voter frustration was heightened by a perception that emissions-intensive businesses were subsidised for the purchase of carbon credits, allowing them to simply pass on all the costs of carbon pricing to consumers without changing their behaviour.

Our research has also consistently showed that there is a deep cynicism about the motivations of all sides of politics. Not dissimilar to voter views toward most political debate about most issues, voters identified that politicians and parties appeared motivated almost entirely by self-interested, short term vote considerations rather than the merits of the issue.

Up until July 2012, the climate change debate narrowed further to focus almost exclusively on the so-called “carbon tax”, to the extent where public positions expressed in support of or opposition to the carbon tax became de-facto indicators of attitudes to climate change. Mainstream debate in Australia about climate change had become falsely and obsessively focused around the carbon tax. People were acutely sensitive to the cost of carbon pricing, especially in a vacuum of understanding of any tangible personal or environmental benefits, and amid abounding horror stories of significant electricity price rises and other negative effects, rightly or wrongly attributed to the carbon tax.

Framing of the climate change debate entirely within the prism of “the carbon tax” served to entrench divisions along political lines among voters and elites alike – it became impossible to articulate a middle-ground position on climate change that recognised the scientific consensus around its reality, while also giving heed to legitimately extant concerns about carbon pricing’s effectiveness and effect on the economy.

This polarisation hid the truth of Australians’ very real and undiminished concerns about climate change and why, following the introduction of carbon pricing, there is a firm belief that it should be given a chance to work.

It is true that a majority of Australians think they are worse off under a carbon tax, and there is obvious confusion and lack of clarity to the extent, if any, of the benefits of Labor’s scheme. This is compounded by a widespread lack of understanding of the operation of the scheme itself and mistrust of the science behind climate change. It is also true that the priority of climate change as an issue has diminished as both macro and micro economic concerns have increased.

But throughout our research, there has been an underlying acceptance in the reality of climate change amongst a two thirds majority of Australians, a belief that has in fact not been dented over the last 12 months. Climate change is a concern because it threatens people’s financial security, their health and environment.

For most people there is a heartfelt compulsion to take action on climate change, and at the very least to take actions to mitigate environmental harm. There is an overwhelming sense of responsibility and of the benefit (even if that is a personal benefit) of “doing my little bit”. Whether people believe climate change is man-made or not, there is almost universal concern that humans are doing irreparable damage to our planet through pollution, excessive consumption and overpopulation, and a belief that we should not stand idly by and allow the disaster to unfold unchecked. People do know that climate change cannot be ignored for much longer and to do so could result in greater risks. Although scepticism and doubt towards the science of climate change persists, voters broadly acknowledge that climate change will require a dedicated response from Australia, and this should most likely involve some form of carbon pricing, commensurate with the trend of global action.

Reinforcing these perceptions, our research shows that:

+ Of those who believe climate change is happening, approximately nine in 10 (and a majority of all Australians) think that we are experiencing impacts in Australia and believe that humans are partly or wholly the cause – and the proportion who think humans are the cause is on the rise.

+ Most Australians agree that further extreme weather events as a result of climate change will cause cost of living rises in Australia, such as increased food prices and higher insurance premiums.

+ Most Australians think that governments need to do more to address climate change (largely because individually they feel somewhat helpless in the face of such a large issue).

+ Support for carbon pricing rises significantly when people are shown the potential outcomes and benefits, especially if this means increased investment in renewable energy and a measurable reduction in carbon pollution.

+ More Australians are in favour of keeping some form of carbon pricing or trading scheme (46 per cent) than are in favour of abolishing it or seeing the Coalition replace it with their Direct Action Plan (36 per cent).

The last point may come as a surprise to many, but it reveals that the underlying concern about climate change is real, and should not be ignored.

Failure to raise awareness, understanding and support for carbon pricing does not override voter desire for action on climate change from governments, global alliances, business and the community. Voters are largely uninspired and unconvinced by Australia’s current climate action policy, but nor do they see wholesale repeal of carbon pricing and lack of action on climate change as a credible strategy for Australia in the future.

So where to from here? It is certainly not about going back and fixing misperceptions and misunderstanding. It might sound obvious, but the opportunity lies in the future, not the past.

The research behind *Climate of the Nation 2013* shows that what gets lost in the climate change debate is the economic opportunity. Most Australians agree that tackling climate change creates new jobs and investment in clean energy, and most agree that tackling climate change presents a unique economic opportunity for the development and sale of renewable energy technology. Importantly, an appreciation of the economic benefits, including job creation, associated with a strong renewable energy industry is not contingent on belief in climate change, or even a belief that humans are responsible; even sceptics can appreciate the opportunity to make a buck.

Given our geopolitical and economic status in the world, voters believe Australia can’t afford to be in a position where we are deliberately ceding the chance to refocus our manufacturing and export industries towards developing and supplying increasing global demand for cleaner, greener technology. Jobs and investment are at stake.

It is Australia’s national aspiration to be the smart country. But Australians believe that regressing on the progress we’ve made on carbon pricing will negatively impact Australia’s opportunity to be an early adopter when it comes to the development of smarter and cleaner technologies for export, and there’s nothing smart about that.

A regressive strategy will likely result in a shift in voter frustration over the lost opportunities to boost economic prosperity while simultaneously acting on voters’ very real concerns about the health, environmental and cost and quality of living impacts of climate change. The research does support a change to the current carbon pricing policy, but the change requires a more effective policy, not abolishing carbon pricing altogether.

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The Climate Institute
Level 15/179 Elizabeth Street
Sydney NSW 2000, Australia
+61 2 8239 6299
info@climateinstitute.org.au



