



The
Climate
Institute

Climate of the Nation 2015
Australian attitudes on climate change

A call for action

THE 2015 RESULTS SHOW INCREASING AWARENESS OF THE CAUSE AND IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, STRENGTHENING SUPPORT FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY AND CARBON POLLUTION REGULATION, AND A GREATER CALL FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION.

Since 2007, The Climate Institute has produced *Climate of the Nation* research, which captures the nation's pulse on climate change, its impacts and solutions. This year's results show increasing awareness of the cause and impacts of climate change, strengthening support for renewable energy and carbon pollution regulation, and a greater call for government action.

The 2015 results confirm that public attitudes have rebounded since the low point of mid-2012, when the political battle was at its most toxic and scare campaigns around the carbon laws untested. The results highlight what a mistake it would be to look at the political and communication challenges of today through the prism of those in 2010-12.

Demand from media and other stakeholders, and generous support from funders, enabled this year's report. Research underpinning this seventh edition of *Climate of the Nation* was conducted by Galaxy Research between 27-29 July.

The findings highlight a growing disconnect between the Abbott government and public views on climate action, renewables and pollution regulation. Government decisions regarding pollution regulation and the forthcoming Paris climate change negotiations provide opportunities to better reflect these views, as well as growing business and international concerns. Global

investments in renewables now outstrip fossil fuel investments and the G7, as well as other mainstream economic institutions, have been urging action to modernise and decarbonise economies.

There is a clear message in this report: "the Abbott government should take climate change more seriously". Sixty three per cent of Australians hold this view, up 6 percentage points from last year. Another 59 per cent agree that the seriousness of climate change is under-estimated by government.

A solid 70 per cent of Australians accept that climate change is occurring. This is the same as last year, but 6 points higher than in 2012. And of that 70 per cent, 93 per cent now think that Australia is already feeling the impacts, up 4 points from last year.

In addition, 89 per cent of those who accept climate change is occurring now think that humans are at least partly the cause for climate change, compared to 84 per cent last year. Forty one per cent think that humans are the main cause, up 6 points from 2014.

In another sign of stronger acceptance of climate change, 57 per cent of Australians now trust the science that suggests that climate change is changing due to human activities, up 6 points from last year, and up 11 points from 2012.

63%

think that the Abbott government should take climate change more seriously, up 6 points from 2014.

71%

of Australians think it is inevitable that Australia's current coal fired generation will need to be replaced.

76%

want the nation to have a pollution reduction policy that shifts responsibility to the polluters, not the taxpayers.

70%

of Australians think that climate is occurring, level with 2014, but up from 64 per cent in 2012.

89%

of Australians who agree climate change is occurring accept humans are at least partly to cause, up 5 points from in 2014.

59%

of Australians want the nation to be a world leader in climate solutions, down 2 points from 2014, but up from 52 per cent in 2012.

Acceptance of the science, and human contributions, are important to sustain the challenging pollution reduction and economic transformation task ahead. Achieving a resilient zero-carbon economy will require more than switching to clean and renewable energy - itself a big task.

And despite the cut-back of the Renewable Energy Target and anti-wind energy campaigns, Australians are even more supportive of solar and wind than last year. Most (84 per cent, up 2 points) prefer solar amongst their top three ideal energy sources, followed by wind (69 per cent, up 5 points). Gas and nuclear have both crashed 7 points to 21 and 13 per cent respectively, with nuclear and coal now tied as least preferred sources of power.

Reinforcing coal power's deep unpopularity is the finding that nearly three-quarters (71 per cent) of the electorate agree that it is inevitable that Australia's current coal-fired power plants will need to be replaced. A similarly large majority (72 per cent) agree that "governments need a plan to ensure the orderly closure of old coal plants and their replacement with clean energy". Only 7 per cent disagree.

Support for regulating and limiting carbon pollution is very strong with two in three (67 per cent) agreeing governments need to regulate carbon pollution. Only 9 per cent disagree.

There is little support for the core element of the government's Direct Action plan, the taxpayer-funded Emissions Reduction Fund. Over three quarters (76 per cent) agree that policy should shift responsibility for pollution reduction to the polluters, not taxpayers.

The Australian Labor Party's recent renewables goal and climate announcements appear to better reflect public attitudes. But the policy detail and its communication will be important to overcome scepticism. Almost half (47 per cent) agree that ALP policies will "just increase electricity prices and not do much about pollution".

Finally, as we head to the Paris climate negotiations at the end of 2015, a majority of Australians (51 per cent) think that Australia's post-2020 pollution reduction targets should be based on scientific understanding of the task required, rather than what other countries' targets do. Another quarter are uncertain. Countries like Canada, the United States, United Kingdom and China were not substantial reference points.

This research demonstrates that some politicians and business leaders are increasingly out of touch with public attitudes on climate change and its solutions.

Politics

Figure 1

“I THINK THAT THE ABBOTT GOVERNMENT SHOULD TAKE CLIMATE CHANGE MORE SERIOUSLY”

2015



2014



Polling that underpins *Climate of the Nation 2015* was conducted in late July, in the lead up to the federal government's announcement of its initial post-2020 carbon pollution reduction target. Australia will take this initial offer into the Paris climate negotiations in December where the next global framework for reducing emissions is being negotiated. If a framework is agreed, and the prospects are good, a final target decision will need to be attached to the agreement in 2016 or 2017.

We asked Australians how the government should approach the target-setting task: should our target be based on what the science says is necessary to avoid extremely dangerous global warming, or should it depend on what other countries are doing, and if so which countries are relevant? A majority - 51 per cent - think that Australia's target should be based on science. A handful looked to the US (2 per cent) or China (3 per cent), and only slightly thought that Australia should follow a similar path to European nations like the UK and Germany (5 per cent). Some 11 per cent thought that Australia should set its target in line with what "similar resource countries like Canada" are doing. There was also significant uncertainty, with 27 per cent unsure.

Desire for Australian leadership remains similar to last year at 59 per cent, although this is still materially higher than the 52 per cent support in 2012. Just over half (51 per cent) are in favour of helping developing countries decrease their emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Only 17 per cent disagree.

Domestically, there is a sense that the government is not taking the issue seriously enough. This year 63 per cent think that the Abbott government should take climate change more seriously, up 6 points from 2014. This view is even stronger among Australians under 34 years of age, 70 per cent of whom agree.

Over two thirds (67 per cent) think that governments need to regulate carbon pollution. And voters want the onus for reducing pollution to be on polluters. Three quarters (76 per cent) agree that pollution reduction policy should put responsibility on the polluters, not the taxpayers. Only 3 per cent disagree and 14 are neutral.

While recent ALP announcements on renewable energy and climate commitments better reflect public views, their policy detail and communication will be important as voters remain sceptical. Almost half of Australians (47 per cent) believe that the ALP's carbon policies will "just increase electricity prices and not do much about pollution". Only 17 per cent disagree and 20 per cent are neutral.

The sting of the carbon tax label may not be as strong as some expect. Just a third of Australians (36 per cent) agree that they won't vote for the ALP because they will bring back the carbon tax. About a quarter are neutral (24 per cent) or disagree (28 per cent). This is still significant but may be more aligned with core voting intentions than the issue itself - a question for further research.

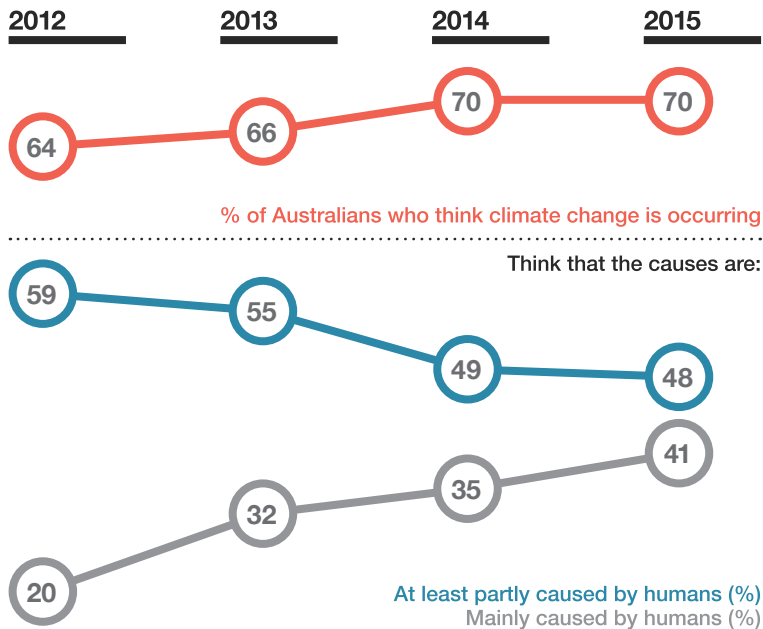
VOTERS WANT THE ONUS FOR REDUCING POLLUTION TO BE ON POLLUTERS. 76% AGREE THAT POLLUTION REDUCTION POLICY SHOULD PUT RESPONSIBILITY ON THE POLLUTERS, NOT THE TAXPAYERS.



Causes + impacts

Figure 2

ARE HUMANS CAUSING CLIMATE CHANGE? MORE AUSTRALIANS ACCEPT THAT WE ARE



Australians' views on whether climate change is occurring are unchanged. A steady majority agree that it is occurring (70 per cent, same as in 2014) and a steady minority do not think it's occurring (12 per cent, 1 point down from 2014). The most significant change was from 2012, when 64 per cent agreed that climate change is occurring.

Among those who think that climate change is occurring, the strongest majority is among Generation Y, 78 per cent of whom hold this view. And among Australians who accept climate change is occurring, 93 per cent agree that Australia is already feeling the impacts, up 4 points from last year. More - 89 per cent - now also think that humans are at least partly the cause for climate change, compared to 84 per cent last year. And there has been a significant increase in those that accept humans as "the main cause" of current climate change: 41 per cent, up 21 points from 2012.

Another sign of the deepening acceptance of climate change is the finding that 57 per cent of Australians now trust the science of climate change that suggests that climate change is changing due to human activities, up 6 points from last year, and up 11 points from 2012.

Sixty nine per cent now agree that ignoring climate change is simply not an answer, as it increases the risk of the situation getting worse, up 5 points from last year.

These findings are in line with other major national polls, such as that conducted by the Lowy institute. Earlier this year Lowy's poll recorded the third successive rise in Australians' concern about climate change. Half of Lowy respondents agreed that "global warming is a serious and pressing problem", up 5 points since 2014 and 14 points since 2012.

There is also a continued decline in the number of Australians thinking that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated: 44 per cent disagree with that statement and 32 per cent agree, compared to 41 per cent and 36 per cent last year. This reverses the situation from 2012, when only 33 per cent thought climate change is not exaggerated, and 42 per cent believed it was.

Older Australians now remain the only demographic who are more likely to believe that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated.

Energy pathways

Figure 3

MOST PREFERRED ENERGY SOURCE

2014

1. Solar	82%
2. Wind	64%
3. Hydro (Dams)	48%
4. Gas	28%
5. Geothermal	22%
6. Tidal / Wave	21%
7. Nuclear	20%
8. Coal	15%



2015

1. Solar	84%
2. Wind	69%
3. Hydro (Dams)	47%
4. Tidal / Wave	30%
5. Geothermal	24%
6. Gas	21%
7. Nuclear	13%
8. Coal	13%

Australian views on the nation's ideal energy mix show that support for renewable energy, already strong, has grown. Solar, wind and hydropower making up the top three preferred sources.

Solar is, by a wider margin, the most preferred energy source for Australia: when presented with eight sources to choose from, 84 per cent of respondents placed solar energy within their top three preferred options, up 2 points from 2014.

Wind came in second, with 69 per cent, up 5 points from last year, a remarkable finding in the face of continued attacks on renewable energy in general, and wind in particular. Women are more keen on wind, with 76 per cent ranking it among their ideal energy mix, compared to 60 per cent of men.

In fact, two thirds of Australians (65 per cent) think that reducing investment in wind farms and reducing the subsidies for householder solar power is the opposite of what is needed. Only 11 per cent disagree.

The most significant change in the rankings of the ideal energy mix has been plunging support for gas. Last year gas ranked fourth, with 28 per cent support. This year it is ranked sixth, with 21 per cent. Regional Australians are the least keen, only 16 per cent of whom ranked gas among their ideal energy mix compared to 23 per cent of city dwellers.

Coal and nuclear remain least preferred, with only 13 per cent backing each. Like gas, nuclear dropped seven points this year.

Nearly three in four (71 per cent) Australians agree that it is inevitable that the nation's current coal-fired generation will need to be replaced. About the same proportion (72 per cent) agree that governments need to implement a plan to ensure the orderly closure of old coal plants and their replacement with clean energy.

A steady majority - 71 per cent, level to last year - think that tackling climate change creates opportunities for new jobs and investment and renewable energy.



Creating change takes leadership. We need people to lead: individuals, communities, investors and business leaders. We need people from all walks of life to step forward and join us as leaders of change.

To support us please visit www.climateinstitute.org.au/support

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Stephen Whately



This report takes the pulse of the nation on climate change, its impacts and solutions in July 2015. It compares benchmarked data from similar work in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

This year's results are based on a nationally representative online survey conducted by Galaxy Research between 27-29 July, 2015 among 1,016 Australians aged 18+.

The maximum margin of error on the sample of 1,016 interviews is +/- 3% at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error will be larger for sub-samples.

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Key imagery in this report
by Michael Hall.

