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Media release

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Youth care less about environment

A new report shows that young Australians are less likely than older Australians to regard themselves as environmentalists, to be avid recyclers and to believe that we must take urgent action to avoid serious environmental damage.

“It is often claimed that Australia’s youth is more environmentally aware than other generations but the evidence shows that it is older Australians who are the most concerned,” said Dr Richard Denniss, Deputy Director of The Australia Institute and author of the report entitled *The Attitudes of Young People to the Environment*.

The new report is based on data collected by Roy Morgan Research from 56 344 respondents aged 14 and over across Australia. The report shows that only 40 per cent of 14-17 year-olds, and 54 per cent of 18-24 year-olds, identify themselves as environmentalists. This compares to a national average of 66 per cent, and a high of 75 per cent among Australians aged 50-64.

The report also shows that 14-25 year-olds are less likely than those aged 25 to 65 to agree with the statement that ‘if we don’t act now we’ll never control our environmental problems’.

Similarly, 14-25 year-olds are more likely than those aged 25-49 to believe that threats to the environment are exaggerated.

“It is surprising to see that, as scientific evidence about the nature and extent of the harm we are doing to the environment is growing, concern about the environment among the young appears to be diminishing,” said Dr Denniss.

Commenting on the new report, Executive Director of The Australia Institute, Dr Clive Hamilton, said:

“Over the past decade our national political leaders have consistently downplayed the threats posed by environmental degradation, especially with respect to climate change. So perhaps it is not surprising that ‘Howard’s Children’ are characterised by apathy and scepticism.”

The paper may be read under What’s New on the Australia Institute’s website.

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