



# Polling - Carbon neutrality, net zero and carbon offsets

*January 2023*

## Key results

The Australia Institute surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,012 Australians in January 2023, about their attitudes about carbon neutrality, net zero and carbon offsets.

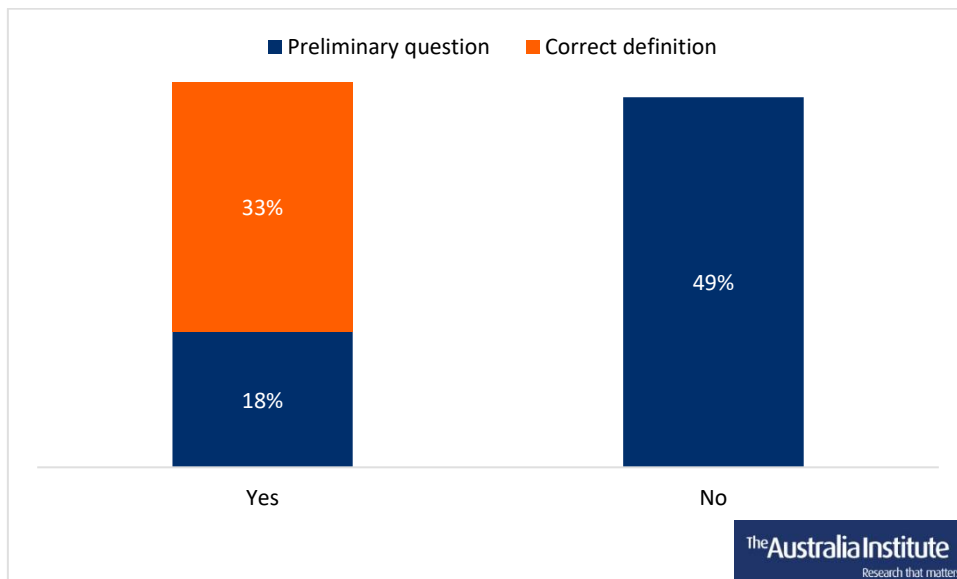
- An overwhelming majority of Australians (85%) have heard the term carbon neutral, but just one in three (33%) know what it means.
- Fewer Australians have heard of net zero (60%) and just over one in ten (14%) know what net zero means.
- Nearly two in three Australians (62%) think that offsets result in cancelled out or less emissions.
- Three in five Australians (58%) think all emissions from business operations, products and services should be accounted for when claiming to be a “carbon neutral organisation”.
- One in three (33%) agree that carbon neutral electricity has the same impact as 100% renewable energy (34% disagree, 32% don’t know).
- Half of Australians (48%) agree that carbon offsets are greenwash.
  - Three in five Australians (62%) agree that carbon offsets help polluters look like they are reducing emissions even when they aren’t.
- Two in five (39%) Australians say that there would be less need for EVs if all petrol was carbon neutral (31% disagree, 30% don’t know).
- Three in five Aussies (61%) say that stopping new gas and coal projects is an effective way to reduce emissions (20% say its ineffective, 19% don’t know).

## Defining ‘carbon neutral’

Most Australians (85%) have heard people or businesses use the term ‘carbon neutral’. However, understandings of the definition of carbon neutral are lower.

- Half of Australians (51%) say they know what carbon neutral means, while the other half (49%) say they do not.
- In total, just one in three respondents (33%) selected the correct definition of carbon neutral.
  - (Correct definition: “Carbon emissions are released, but are cancelled out by other activities like buying offsets.”)
- Greens voters were the most familiar with the term carbon neutral, with half (50%) selecting the correct definition.

**Figure 1: Understanding of the term carbon neutral**

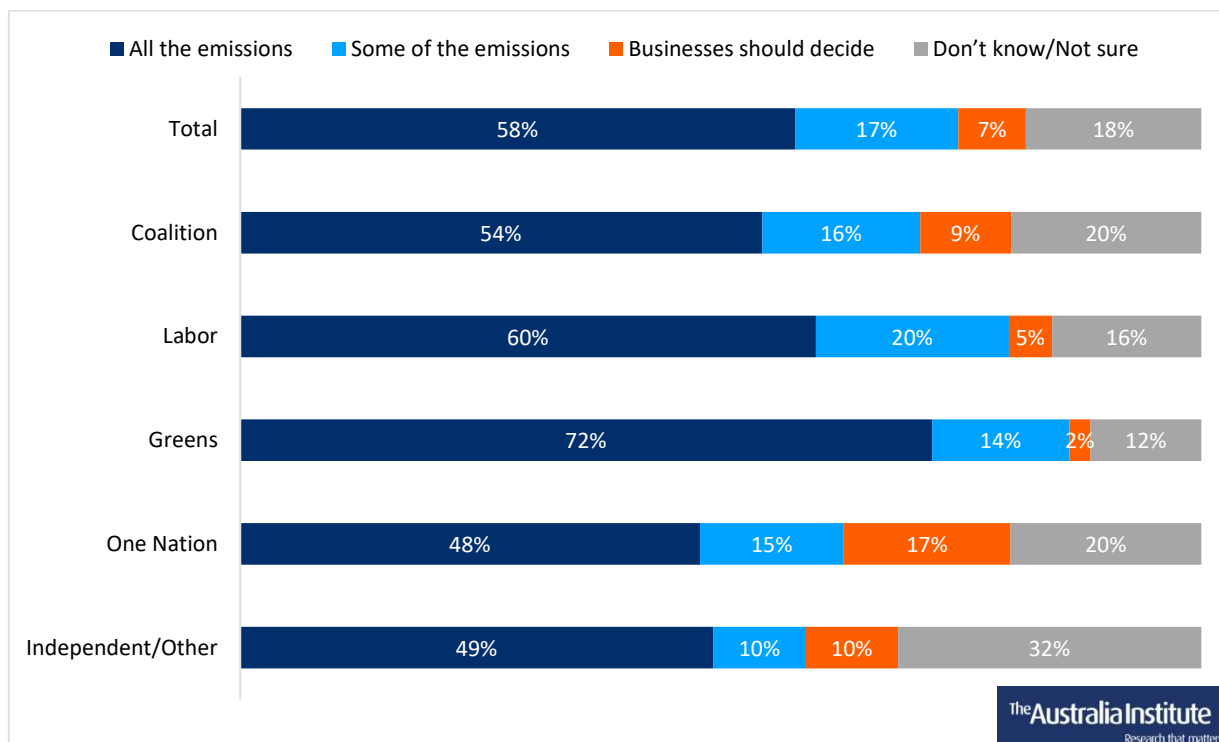


## Emissions accounted for under carbon neutral

Respondents were asked what portion of a business' emissions should be accounted for to claim to be a "carbon neutral organisation".

- Three in five Australians (58%) think that all the emissions from business operations (offices, warehouses and transport), products it makes and services it provides should be accounted for.
- One in five Australians (17%) think some of the emissions should be accounted for, and fewer than one in ten (7%) think organisations should be allowed to decide which emissions they offset to say they're carbon neutral.
- Across all voting intentions, at least half (48%–72%) think all emissions should be accounted for to claim to be carbon neutral.
  - Greens voters (72%) are most likely to think all emissions should be accounted for, followed by Labor (60%) and Coalition (54%) voters.

**Figure 2: Views on what portion of business emissions should be accounted for in claims to be a "carbon neutral organization", by voting intention**

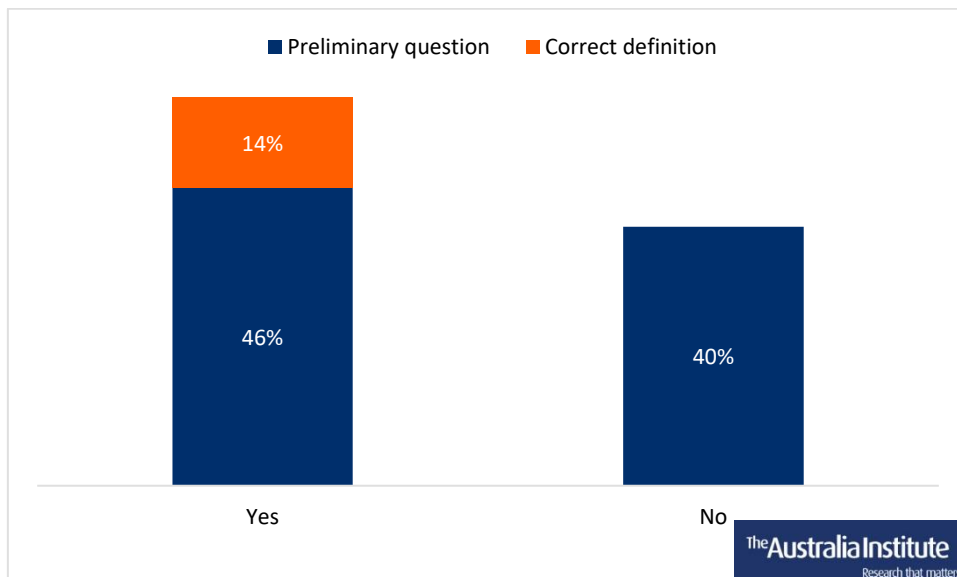


## Defining ‘net zero’

Three in five Australians (60%) have heard people or businesses use the term ‘net zero’. However, understandings of the definition of net zero are lower.

- Two thirds (65%) of Australians said they do not know what net zero means.
- Just over one in ten (14%) respondents selected the correct definition of net zero.
  - (Correct definition: “Greenhouse gas emissions are released, but are cancelled out by other activities like buying offsets.”)
- Across voting intentions, fewer than one in four respondents (10%–22%) selected the correct definition for net zero.

**Figure 3: Understanding of the term net zero**

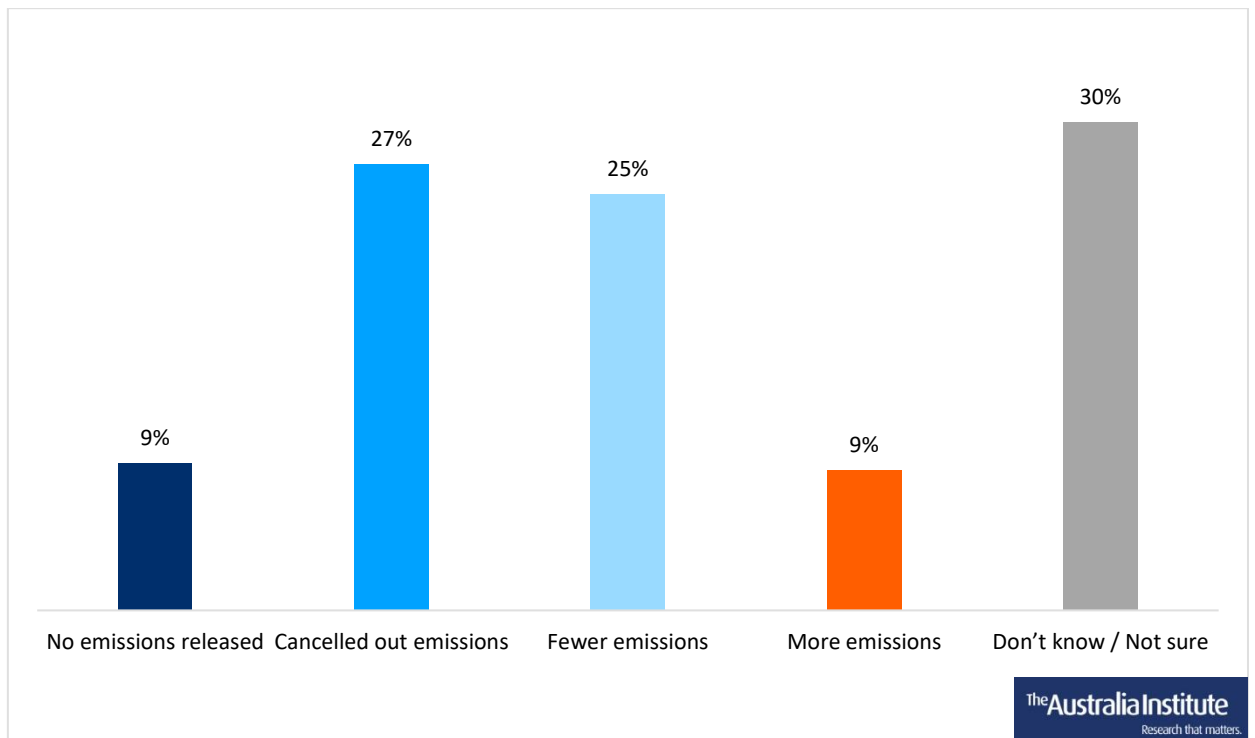


## Impact of offsets on emissions

Three in five Australians (62%) think that carbon offsets result in cancelled out, fewer or zero overall emissions in the atmosphere.

- One in ten (9%) think offsets result in no emissions released.
- One in four (25%) think offsets result in fewer emissions.
- One in four (27%) think offsets result in cancelled out emissions.
- One in ten (9%) think offsets result in more emissions.
- Greens voters (43%) are most likely to think offsets result in cancelled out emissions, followed by Labor voters (28%), Coalition voters (25%), then One Nation voters (20%).

**Figure 4: Perceived impact of offsets on overall emissions**

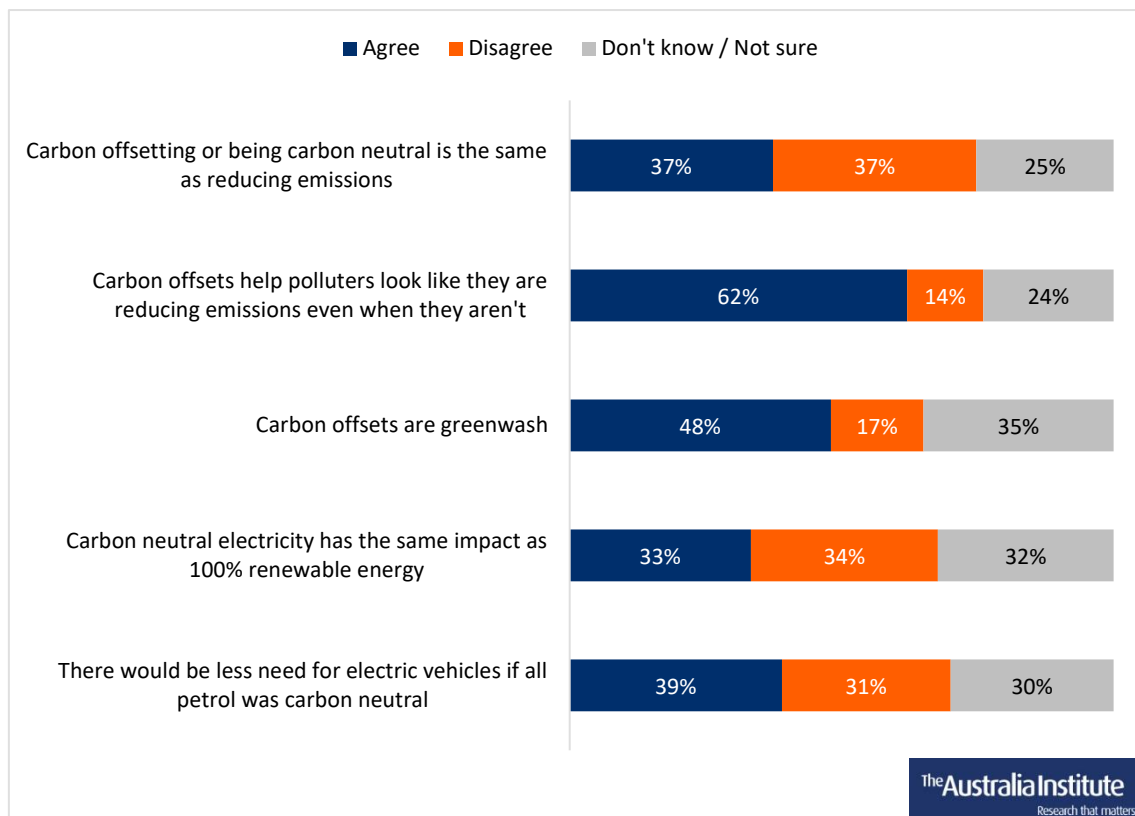


## Perceptions of carbon offsets and carbon neutrality

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with five statements relating to carbon offsets and carbon neutrality.

- Two in five Australians (37%) agree that carbon offsetting is the same as reducing emissions, while two in five (37%) disagree.
- Three in five (62%) agree that carbon offsets help polluters look like they are reducing emissions even when they aren't (14% disagree).
- Half (48%) agree that carbon offsets are greenwash (17% disagree).
- One in three (33%) agree that carbon neutral electricity has the same impact as 100% renewable energy, and one in three (34%) disagree.
- Two in five (39%) agree that there would be less need for electric vehicles if all petrol was carbon neutral (31% disagree).

Figure 5: Views on carbon offsets and carbon neutrality

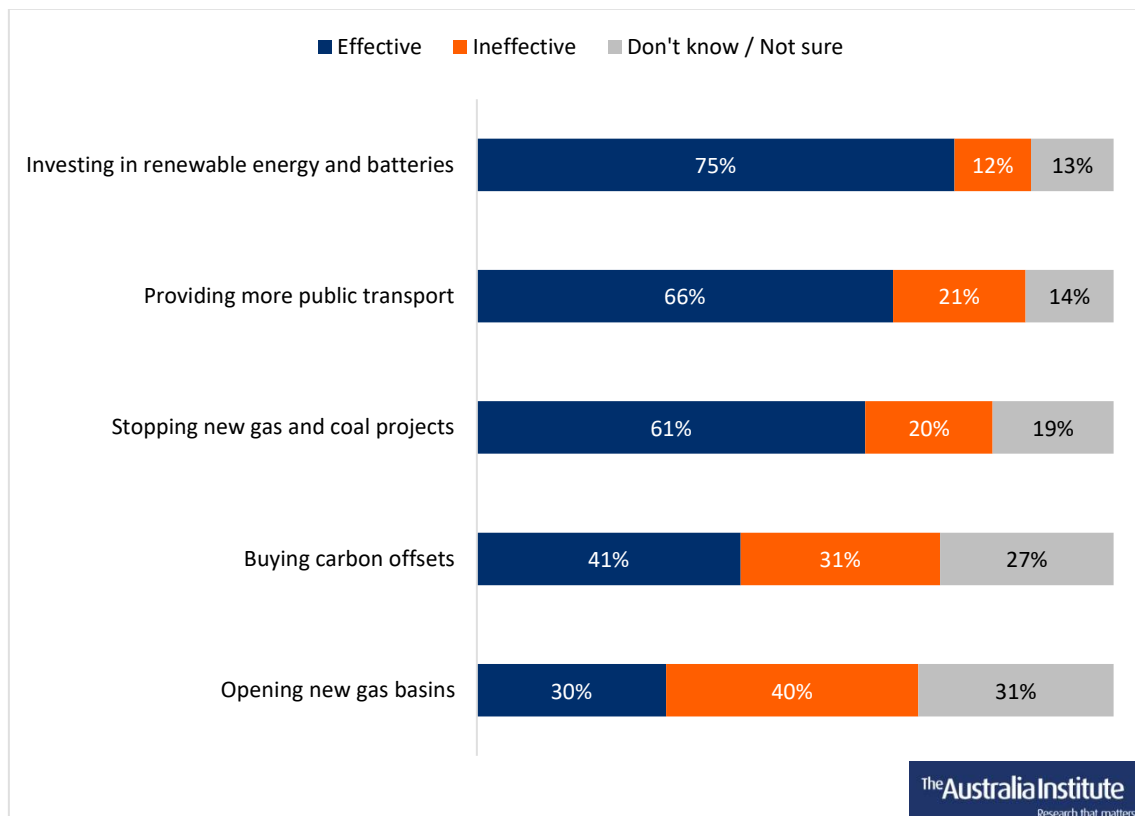


## Effectiveness of activities in reducing emissions

Respondents were asked to rate five activities or technologies according to their effectiveness in reducing emissions. Australians considered investing in renewable energy and batteries and providing more public transport as the most effective, while opening new gas basins and buying carbon offsets were considered most ineffective.

- Three in four (75%) think that investing in renewable energy and batteries is effective in reducing emissions (12% think it is ineffective).
- Two in three (66%) think that providing more public transport is effective in reducing emissions (21% think it is ineffective).
- Three in five (61%) think that stopping new gas and coal projects is effective in reducing emissions (20% think it is ineffective).
- Two in five (41%) think that buying carbon offsets is effective in reducing emissions, while (31% think it is ineffective).
- Two in five (40%) think that opening new gas basins is ineffective in reducing emissions, while one in three (30%) think it is effective.

**Figure 6: Perceived effectiveness of activities and technologies in reducing emissions**



## Method

Between 18 and 23 January 2023, The Australia Institute surveyed 1,012 adults living in Australia. Surveys were conducted online through Dynata’s panel, with nationally representative samples by gender, age group, and state and territory. Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the House of Representatives. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs.

The research is compliant with the [Australian Polling Council Quality Mark standards](#). The long methodology disclosure statement follows.

### Long disclosure statement

The results were weighted by three variables (gender, age group, and state and territory) based on Australian Bureau of Statistics [“National, state and territory population”](#) data, using the raking method. Those who answered the gender identity question as "Non-binary", "I use a different term", or "Prefer not to answer" had their responses included with females for the purpose of reporting, due to constraints from weighting data availability. This resulted in an effective sample size of 938.

The margin of error (95% confidence level) for the national results is  $\pm 3\%$ .

Results are shown only for larger states.

Voting intention questions appeared just after the initial demographic questions, before policy questions. Respondents who answered “Don’t know / Not sure” for voting intention were then asked a leaning question; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs. “Coalition” includes separate responses for Liberal and National. “Other” refers to Independent/Other, and minor parties in cases where they were included in the voting intention but represent too small a sample to be reported separately in the crosstabs.



**Australian  
Polling Council  
Quality Mark**



## Detailed results

No preceding questions in the poll are expected to have influenced the results of the questions published here.

### Have you heard people or businesses use the term “carbon neutral”?

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
<b>Yes</b>	85%	85%	86%	84%	83%	88%	89%
<b>No</b>	15%	15%	14%	16%	17%	12%	11%

	<i>Total</i>	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
<b>Yes</b>	85%	85%	85%	87%	88%	86%
<b>No</b>	15%	15%	15%	13%	12%	14%

### Do you know what carbon neutral means?

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
<b>Yes</b>	51%	55%	47%	55%	49%	48%	45%
<b>No</b>	49%	45%	53%	45%	51%	52%	55%

	<i>Total</i>	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
<b>Yes</b>	51%	50%	49%	70%	52%	46%
<b>No</b>	49%	50%	51%	30%	48%	54%

### Which of the following is a definition of carbon neutral?

	<i>Total</i>	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
<b>No carbon emissions are released</b>	15%	13%	18%	19%	16%	11%	8%
<b>Companies pay a tax on their carbon emissions</b>	6%	5%	6%	6%	3%	4%	13%
<b>Carbon emissions are released, but are cancelled out by other activities like buying offsets</b>	65%	69%	60%	62%	63%	67%	66%
<b>Companies don't mind if they release carbon emissions</b>	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%	0%	3%

<b>Companies are reducing carbon emissions in some parts of their business</b>	12%	10%	15%	10%	16%	18%	8%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Labor</b>	<b>Greens</b>	<b>PHON</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>No carbon emissions are released</b>	15%	21%	13%	8%	27%	8%
<b>Companies pay a tax on their carbon emissions</b>	6%	3%	7%	3%	7%	12%
<b>Carbon emissions are released, but are cancelled out by other activities like buying offsets</b>	65%	64%	67%	72%	55%	55%
<b>Companies don't mind if they release carbon emissions</b>	2%	2%	0%	3%	3%	3%
<b>Companies are reducing carbon emissions in some parts of their business</b>	12%	10%	12%	14%	8%	22%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

To call themselves a “carbon neutral organization” a business purchases carbon offsets to balance or cancel out their emissions. What portion of the business’ emissions should be accounted for to make this claim?

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>NSW</b>	<b>VIC</b>	<b>QLD</b>	<b>WA</b>
<b>All the emissions from business operations (offices, warehouses and transport), products it makes and services it provides</b>	58%	61%	55%	59%	56%	55%	54%
<b>Some of the emissions from operations (offices, warehouses and transport), products it makes and services it provides</b>	17%	17%	17%	18%	18%	16%	15%
<b>Organisations should be allowed to decide which emissions they offset to say they're carbon neutral</b>	7%	7%	7%	6%	5%	11%	9%

<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	18%	15%	21%	17%	21%	18%	21%
------------------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Labor</b>	<b>Greens</b>	<b>PHON</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>All the emissions from business operations (offices, warehouses and transport), products it makes and services it provides</b>	58%	54%	60%	72%	48%	49%
<b>Some of the emissions from operations (offices, warehouses and transport), products it makes and services it provides</b>	17%	16%	20%	14%	15%	10%
<b>Organisations should be allowed to decide which emissions they offset to say they're carbon neutral</b>	7%	9%	5%	2%	17%	10%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	18%	20%	16%	12%	20%	32%

**Have you heard people or businesses use the term net zero?**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>NSW</b>	<b>VIC</b>	<b>QLD</b>	<b>WA</b>
<b>Yes</b>	60%	65%	55%	62%	61%	56%	54%
<b>No</b>	40%	35%	45%	38%	39%	44%	46%

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Labor</b>	<b>Greens</b>	<b>PHON</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Yes</b>	60%	62%	56%	66%	64%	57%
<b>No</b>	40%	38%	44%	34%	36%	43%

**Do you know what net zero means?**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>NSW</b>	<b>VIC</b>	<b>QLD</b>	<b>WA</b>
<b>Yes</b>	35%	43%	27%	37%	38%	26%	30%
<b>No</b>	65%	57%	73%	63%	62%	74%	70%

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Coalition</b>	<b>Labor</b>	<b>Greens</b>	<b>PHON</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Yes</b>	35%	39%	31%	43%	34%	28%
<b>No</b>	65%	61%	69%	57%	66%	72%

Which of the following is a definition of net zero?

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
No greenhouse gas emissions are released	29%	25%	34%	26%	34%	23%	34%
Greenhouse gas emissions are released now, but will stop by 2050	17%	15%	19%	18%	13%	20%	24%
Greenhouse gas emissions are released, but are cancelled out by other activities like buying offsets	41%	45%	34%	35%	41%	49%	32%
Companies have to show they are reducing their greenhouse gas emissions	8%	7%	9%	9%	8%	6%	5%
Companies are reducing greenhouse gases in some parts of their business	6%	7%	3%	12%	3%	3%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	3%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
No greenhouse gas emissions are released	29%	37%	21%	28%	30%	32%
Greenhouse gas emissions are released now, but will stop by 2050	17%	18%	15%	11%	36%	10%
Greenhouse gas emissions are released, but are cancelled out by other activities like buying offsets	41%	36%	42%	51%	29%	46%
Companies have to show they are reducing their greenhouse gas emissions	8%	3%	13%	8%	0%	12%
Companies are reducing greenhouse gases in some parts of their business	6%	5%	9%	2%	5%	0%
Don't know / Not sure	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%

For overall emissions in the atmosphere, do carbon offsets result in:

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>VIC</i>	<i>QLD</i>	<i>WA</i>
No emissions released	9%	9%	9%	11%	9%	8%	9%
Cancelled out emissions	27%	33%	22%	25%	28%	31%	19%

Fewer emissions	25%	24%	27%	28%	25%	20%	29%
More emissions	9%	9%	8%	9%	8%	8%	9%
Don't know / Not sure	30%	25%	34%	27%	31%	32%	35%

	Total	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
No emissions released	9%	10%	9%	7%	9%	7%
Cancelled out emissions	27%	25%	28%	43%	20%	19%
Fewer emissions	25%	26%	26%	28%	31%	17%
More emissions	9%	8%	9%	6%	9%	9%
Don't know / Not sure	30%	31%	29%	15%	31%	47%

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:  
*“Carbon offsetting or being carbon neutral is the same as reducing emissions”*

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Strongly agree	9%	10%	8%	9%	7%	11%	5%
Agree	29%	31%	27%	32%	28%	26%	33%
Disagree	27%	27%	28%	26%	28%	27%	24%
Strongly disagree	10%	13%	7%	10%	9%	10%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	25%	20%	31%	24%	28%	26%	29%

	Total	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
Strongly agree	9%	7%	11%	7%	7%	8%
Agree	29%	32%	30%	29%	15%	18%
Disagree	27%	26%	27%	35%	29%	25%
Strongly disagree	10%	8%	8%	15%	19%	14%
Don't know / Not sure	25%	27%	24%	14%	29%	34%

*“Carbon offsets help polluters look like they are reducing emissions even when they aren't”*

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Strongly agree	20%	23%	17%	22%	20%	19%	18%
Agree	43%	44%	42%	45%	38%	40%	46%
Disagree	11%	12%	10%	9%	14%	9%	11%
Strongly disagree	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	24%	18%	29%	22%	26%	29%	20%

	Total	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
Strongly agree	20%	15%	20%	27%	25%	26%

Agree	43%	44%	45%	44%	33%	32%
Disagree	11%	13%	9%	10%	11%	8%
Strongly disagree	3%	3%	3%	4%	8%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	24%	25%	23%	15%	23%	32%

***“Carbon offsets are greenwash”***

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Strongly agree	16%	17%	14%	18%	13%	17%	15%
Agree	32%	34%	30%	33%	34%	31%	30%
Disagree	15%	17%	12%	12%	16%	13%	13%
Strongly disagree	3%	4%	2%	2%	3%	3%	4%
Don't know / Not sure	35%	28%	42%	35%	33%	36%	38%

	Total	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
Strongly agree	16%	14%	16%	16%	22%	13%
Agree	32%	33%	32%	34%	38%	26%
Disagree	15%	12%	16%	24%	7%	12%
Strongly disagree	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	35%	39%	34%	23%	32%	46%

***“Carbon neutral electricity has the same impact as 100% renewable energy”***

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Strongly agree	8%	8%	9%	9%	6%	10%	9%
Agree	25%	26%	25%	27%	25%	29%	20%
Disagree	22%	25%	19%	21%	28%	19%	22%
Strongly disagree	12%	15%	10%	11%	12%	12%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	32%	26%	38%	33%	28%	30%	42%

	Total	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
Strongly agree	8%	8%	9%	6%	8%	7%
Agree	25%	30%	25%	17%	22%	20%
Disagree	22%	23%	24%	28%	9%	11%
Strongly disagree	12%	11%	9%	25%	22%	11%
Don't know / Not sure	32%	28%	32%	24%	39%	51%

***“There would be less need for electric vehicles if all petrol was carbon neutral”***

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Strongly agree	11%	10%	12%	12%	11%	10%	10%
Agree	28%	27%	29%	30%	26%	27%	26%

Disagree	19%	22%	17%	17%	24%	22%	17%
Strongly disagree	11%	14%	9%	12%	9%	10%	10%
Don't know / Not sure	30%	28%	33%	28%	30%	31%	36%

	Total	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
Strongly agree	11%	12%	10%	7%	18%	9%
Agree	28%	30%	28%	26%	24%	25%
Disagree	19%	17%	22%	24%	15%	15%
Strongly disagree	11%	7%	9%	24%	15%	15%
Don't know / Not sure	30%	33%	30%	18%	29%	37%

Rate each activity or technology according to its effectiveness in reducing emissions

*Opening new gas basins*

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Very effective	9%	11%	7%	10%	6%	11%	12%
Effective	20%	24%	18%	23%	20%	18%	19%
Ineffective	25%	28%	23%	24%	27%	28%	22%
Very ineffective	14%	16%	13%	14%	15%	11%	16%
Don't know / Not sure	31%	22%	39%	30%	31%	32%	31%

	Total	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
Very effective	9%	9%	10%	5%	17%	6%
Effective	20%	26%	20%	11%	29%	11%
Ineffective	25%	28%	25%	28%	19%	18%
Very ineffective	14%	6%	16%	33%	12%	16%
Don't know / Not sure	31%	30%	30%	22%	24%	49%

*Providing more public transport*

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Very effective	18%	20%	16%	20%	16%	16%	18%
Effective	48%	51%	45%	42%	49%	47%	59%
Ineffective	17%	16%	17%	22%	16%	15%	12%
Very ineffective	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	2%	3%
Don't know / Not sure	14%	9%	18%	13%	13%	19%	8%

	Total	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
Very effective	18%	16%	20%	21%	16%	12%
Effective	48%	49%	49%	50%	29%	48%

Ineffective	17%	21%	14%	12%	22%	18%
Very ineffective	4%	3%	3%	5%	12%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	14%	12%	14%	12%	21%	17%

### *Investing in renewable energy and batteries*

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Very effective	33%	36%	29%	30%	32%	32%	34%
Effective	42%	39%	45%	43%	42%	40%	48%
Ineffective	9%	11%	7%	11%	10%	7%	6%
Very ineffective	3%	5%	2%	4%	2%	4%	5%
Don't know / Not sure	13%	9%	17%	12%	14%	16%	8%

	Total	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
Very effective	33%	22%	38%	53%	23%	25%
Effective	42%	47%	43%	31%	37%	41%
Ineffective	9%	13%	5%	9%	10%	12%
Very ineffective	3%	5%	1%	1%	14%	2%
Don't know / Not sure	13%	13%	12%	6%	16%	20%

### *Stopping new gas and coal projects*

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Very effective	25%	26%	24%	25%	23%	24%	28%
Effective	36%	36%	36%	39%	36%	31%	39%
Ineffective	12%	16%	9%	14%	11%	14%	7%
Very ineffective	8%	9%	6%	7%	7%	9%	8%
Don't know / Not sure	19%	13%	25%	16%	23%	22%	19%

	Total	Coalition	Labor	Greens	PHON	Other
Very effective	25%	16%	30%	40%	17%	21%
Effective	36%	38%	38%	39%	23%	22%
Ineffective	12%	18%	9%	9%	12%	14%
Very ineffective	8%	11%	4%	2%	31%	7%
Don't know / Not sure	19%	16%	20%	10%	18%	36%

### *Buying carbon offsets*

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA
Very effective	10%	10%	10%	10%	9%	11%	9%
Effective	32%	31%	32%	32%	32%	28%	38%



<b>Ineffective</b>	22%	26%	18%	25%	23%	22%	14%
<b>Very ineffective</b>	9%	12%	6%	8%	8%	12%	9%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	27%	20%	34%	25%	28%	27%	31%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
<b>Very effective</b>	10%	8%	13%	10%	6%	7%
<b>Effective</b>	32%	32%	35%	34%	27%	17%
<b>Ineffective</b>	22%	24%	22%	29%	13%	17%
<b>Very ineffective</b>	9%	11%	5%	12%	22%	12%
<b>Don't know / Not sure</b>	27%	25%	26%	16%	32%	47%