

# Climate of the Nation 2023

Tracking Australia's attitudes  
towards climate change and energy

Research report  
**Elizabeth Morison**



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## Our Purpose

The Institute publishes research that contributes to a more just, sustainable and peaceful society. Our goal is to gather, interpret and communicate evidence in order to both diagnose the problems we face and propose new solutions to tackle them.

Level 1, Endeavour House  
1 Franklin Street  
Canberra, ACT 2601  
Tel: 02 6130 0530  
Email: [mail@australiainstitute.org.au](mailto:mail@australiainstitute.org.au)  
Website: [australiainstitute.org.au](http://australiainstitute.org.au)  
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# Climate of the Nation 2023

Tracking Australia's attitudes towards climate change and energy

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## Contents

4	Key Findings
6	Foreword
8	Executive Summary
10	Aim + Approach
11	Attitudes Towards Climate Change
18	Australia's Climate Policies
30	Climate Integrity
38	Australia's International Reputation
40	Mining
46	Electricity Transition
51	Demographic Snapshot
54	Conclusion

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## Acknowledgements

*Climate of the Nation is the longest continuous survey of community attitudes to climate change in the country. The Australia Institute acknowledges the dedicated work of the Climate Institute, which produced the report from 2007-2017.*

*The Australia Institute is delighted to publish this benchmark report for the sixth year and wishes to thank the following people and foundations for their support:*

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- Australia Institute monthly donors

# Key Findings

**75%**

of Australians are concerned that climate change will result in more expensive insurance premiums

**75%**

are concerned about climate-related disruptions to supply chains making it hard to buy necessities

**80%**

are concerned climate change will result in droughts and flooding affecting crop production and food supply and 79% are concerned it will result in more bushfires

**76%**

agree that climate impacts should be considered by the Environment Minister when approving fossil fuel projects

**56%**

of Australians say that opening new gas, coal and oil projects will make it harder for Australia to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030

**3x**

as many Australians think fossil fuel companies should pay the costs of responding to climate change (45%) than think the burden should be borne by those facing climate change impacts (15%)



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**78%**

agree that climate policy should be based on best-practice climate science

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**74%**

of Australians aged between 18 and 24 support the government stopping the approvals of new gas, coal and oil projects

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**74%**

of Australians support the concept of a "polluter-pays" tax for businesses based on how much they pollute

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**66%**

of Australians support a windfall profits tax on oil and gas

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**72%**

think government climate agencies should not employ individuals who are also employed by companies or organisations that could be affected by their advice

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**65%**

of Australians think governments should be responsible for checking the accuracy of net zero and carbon neutral claims of companies

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**33x**


the factor by which Australians overestimate coal industry employment as a proportion of total employment

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**69x**

the factor by which Australians overestimate gas and oil industry employment as a proportion of total employment

# Foreword

The background of the page features a silhouette of several wind turbines against a vibrant sunset sky. The sky transitions from a deep orange near the horizon to a darker, almost black, at the top. The turbines are positioned in the lower half of the image, their blades clearly visible against the bright light of the setting sun.

For many Australians, 2023 has been defined by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. The spiralling costs of consumer goods, along with persistently high petrol and energy prices, have left households struggling to make ends meet.

Nevertheless, even with the overwhelming and understandable distraction caused by inflation and ever-growing interest rates, climate change remains at the forefront of the nation's consciousness. Over 70% of Australians say that they are concerned about climate change and its impacts, including the potential it has to compound existing cost-of-living pressures.

Beyond the immediate effects of high energy and fuel prices—exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, price gouging by gas companies and failure to invest in modern infrastructure and renewable power generation—Australians recognise the less obvious but far-reaching implications the climate crisis will have for agriculture, food supplies and insurance premiums.

An overwhelming majority of Australians are concerned that climate change will result in more expensive insurance premiums (75%), and that it will disrupt supply chains, making it hard to buy necessities (75%).

There is good reason for this concern. The combination of the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires and the extensive flooding across the east coast of Australia that followed led to a sharp spike in the already growing cost of insurance in flood-, bushfire-, and cyclone-prone areas.<sup>1</sup>

Premiums have dramatically outpaced the Consumer Price Index in Australia, and are increasingly becoming prohibitive for those in the areas where insurance will be needed the most. The bushfires and floods also created significant supply chain disruptions across the country, pushing up the prices of basic necessities.

The fact that fossil fuel companies have continued to enjoy record profits throughout this challenging period is, no doubt, cold comfort to Australians facing both climate and cost-of-living crises.



In 2023, fossil fuel companies expect to make up to \$140 billion in profit on export revenue from liquefied natural gas (LNG) and coal.<sup>2</sup> For all these eye-watering profits, many of the biggest fossil fuel companies in Australia pay little to no income tax.<sup>3</sup>

Natural disasters, meanwhile, currently cost the Australian economy \$38 billion a year—a figure that is estimated to increase to \$73 billion by 2060.<sup>4</sup> *Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that Australians support the fossil fuel industry starting to pay its way, with two in three Australians (66%) supporting a windfall profits tax on the oil and gas industry.

Most Australians (59%) also support the introduction of a levy on Australia's fossil fuel exports to help fund local government actions to prepare for, and protect from, the consequences of climate change.

Despite the carbon tax scare campaigns in previous years, 74% of Australians support the concept of holding industry to account through a “polluter-pays” tax that would require companies to bear the cost of the damage they do to the environment. Support for such a tax in Australia is broad across all political affiliations (with the exception of One Nation voters): four in five Labor voters (81%) and nearly three quarters of Coalition voters (71%) endorse the concept.

It is clear Australians are in no doubt about the unequivocal link between the climate crisis and the production and combustion of fossil fuels. It is also clear that the message isn't reaching Federal Government.

At a time when 76% agree that Australia's Environment Minister should be required to consider climate change impacts when deciding whether to approve fossil fuel projects, and most Australians (55%) want coal and gas power to be phased out as soon as possible and replaced with clean energy, even if it costs more in the short term, the Australian Government's *Resources and Energy Major Projects* report lists over 100 new fossil fuel projects in various stages of development.<sup>5</sup>

Notably, the proportion of those wanting an end to fossil fuel project approvals in line with the International Energy Agency's 1.5°C pathway is higher among younger people: 74% of Australians aged 18-24 support the idea.

Having voted for climate action in 2022, Australians are losing patience with greenwashing and incrementalism. Almost half of Australians (47%) say that the Australian Government is not doing enough to prepare for, and adapt to, the impacts of climate change. This is unsurprising, given that Australian Federal and state governments continue to commit \$11.1 billion a year on fossil fuel subsidies.

Most Australians (78%) want independent, science-based climate policy. This includes ensuring the independence of the agencies advising the government on climate: 72% of Australians think government climate agencies should not employ individuals who are also employed by companies or organisations that could be affected by their advice.

Ultimately, Australia's climate policies should serve the climate and the Australian people, not the fossil fuel industry.

*Climate of the Nation 2023* should give our leaders confidence that even with competing cost-of-living concerns, Australians want transparent, evidence-based climate action, and a government with the courage to implement policy that will drive genuine decarbonisation.

**Polly Hemming**  
Climate & Energy Program Director, The Australia Institute

<sup>1</sup> Insurance Council (2022) *Insurance Catastrophe Resilience Report 2021-22*, [https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/20683\\_ICA\\_Final\\_WebOptimised.pdf](https://insurancecouncil.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/20683_ICA_Final_WebOptimised.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Buckley (2022) *Fossil fuel exporters' \$140b profit as bills soar*, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/fossil-fuel-exporters-140b-profit-as-bills-soar-20221209-p5c57b.html>

<sup>3</sup> Ogge (2022) *APPEA members who pay no income tax*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/appea-members-who-pay-no-income-tax/>

<sup>4</sup> Deloitte Access Economics (2021) *Special report: Update to the economic costs of natural disasters in Australia* <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/economics/articles/building-australias-natural-disaster-resilience.html>

<sup>5</sup> Campbell, Ogge & Verstegan (2023) *New fossil fuel projects in Australia 2023*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/new-fossil-fuel-projects-in-australia-2023/>



# Executive Summary

The Australia Institute's annual *Climate of the Nation* report provides a comprehensive account of Australian attitudes towards climate change, its causes and impacts, and the integrity of Australia's current and proposed climate solutions.

*Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that, despite the pressure of the cost-of-living crisis, concern about climate change remains high among Australians, and that there is broad support for a range of decarbonisation policies and climate actions.

## Concern about climate change remains high despite cost-of-living crisis

In 2023, 71% of Australians report being concerned about climate change. This figure is just shy of the highest level of concern, which was the 75% recorded in 2021 and 2022. The intensity of concern is evenly split between those who are very concerned (34%) and those who are fairly concerned (37%).

The top three climate impacts of concern are:

1. More droughts and flooding affecting crop production and food supply (80%);
2. More bushfires (79%); and
3. The extinction of animal and plant species (79%).

In 2023, *Climate of the Nation* asked for the first time about Australians' concerns regarding the impact of climate change on the cost of living. Three in four (75%) say they are concerned about more expensive insurance premiums, and the same proportion (75%) are concerned about disruptions to supply chains making it harder to buy necessities.

## Australians oppose new gas, coal and oil projects and fossil fuel subsidies

A majority of Australians (55%) support Australia following the International Energy Agency (IEA) pathway to avoiding the "the worst effects of climate change" by limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C—a pathway that requires no approvals of any new gas, coal or oil projects.

In addition, 56% of Australians know that opening new coal, gas and oil projects will make it harder for Australia to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030.

Two in three (66%) think Australian governments should plan to phase out coal mining and transition into other industries. Despite this, in 2022-23, Australian governments committed \$11.1 billion in subsidies for fossil fuel projects. While one in three (33%) want new coal mines to be allowed, just 7% support using taxpayer funds to subsidise those mines.

## Australians think government is not doing enough on climate

Almost half of Australians (47%) think the Federal Government is not doing enough to prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change. One in four (26%) think the Federal Government is doing enough, and only 15% think it is doing too much.

## Most Australians support a windfall profits tax, and a levy on fossil fuel exports

Three in four Australians (74%) support Australia imposing a tax on businesses based on how much they pollute. Two in three Australians (66%) support a windfall profits tax on the oil and gas industry, and 59% support the introduction of a levy on Australia's fossil fuel exports to help fund local government actions to prepare for, and protect from, the consequences of climate change.

## Australians think fossil fuel companies should pay for climate impacts

Natural disasters cost the Australian economy \$38 billion a year, a cost estimated to increase to \$73 billion by 2060. Almost half (45%) of respondents believe that fossil fuel producers should pay for the costs of responding to climate change, three times more than who think taxpayers (12%) or people facing climate change impacts (15%) should bear the costs.



## **Net zero and carbon neutral claims are unclear, and governments should be responsible for regulating these claims**

The private sector is increasingly using claims of net zero emissions and carbon neutrality to demonstrate climate ambition to consumers. However, both “net zero” and “carbon neutral” are largely misunderstood terms.

When asked to select the definition of each term from a list, just 38% of Australians correctly understand “carbon neutral”, and only 26% of Australians correctly understand “net zero”. For both terms, one in five Australians say they do not know its best definition.

Many Australians think that use of these terms mean no emissions are released, or that companies are reducing emissions in some parts of their business. In fact, “net zero” and “carbon neutral” claims are often underpinned by creative accounting that enables companies to produce significant emissions.

Two in three Australians (65%) think that governments should be responsible for checking the accuracy of net zero and carbon neutral claims.

Only 16% say that companies should be responsible, and just one in 20 Australians (5%) say that customers should bear the burden of checking the accuracy of these climate claims.

## **While Australians think offsets reduce overall emissions, the opposite is true**

Three in five Australians (60%) think that when businesses offset their emissions, the overall quantity of emissions in the atmosphere either stays the same (38%) or is reduced (22%).

Fewer than one in five Australians (17%) correctly identify that when a business claims it has offset its emissions, the quantity of emissions in the atmosphere nevertheless continues to increase, because that business is still producing carbon dioxide and/or other greenhouse gases.

## **The economic role of gas and coal is significantly overestimated**

As in previous years, Australians continue to overestimate the contributions of the gas and coal industries to the Australian economy, both in terms of employment and of economic value. Australians overestimate the size of gas and oil industry employment by a factor of 69, believing it employs 10.4% of the total workforce.

In reality, oil and gas employment make up only 0.2% of the workforce. Australians also overestimate the economic value of the gas industry, believing it accounts for 12.4% of GDP, when the actual figure is around 2.5%.

Australians also overestimate the size of coal mining employment, this time by a factor of 33. On average, Australians believe the coal mining industry makes up 11% of the total workforce, when in reality it makes up just 0.3% of the workforce. The share of GDP attributable to coal mining is also overestimated significantly by Australians, with the perceived contribution to GDP being 13.6% and the actual figure just 2.6%.

Australians believe that the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax (PRRT), the main way the Australian Government collects revenue from oil and gas exploration and mining, contributed 12% to the federal budget for the 2022-23 year. In reality, the PRRT contributed just 0.4%.

## **Australia should be a world leader on climate**

Increasingly, Australia’s climate policies are influencing Australia’s international reputation. Most Australians (55%) agree that continued inaction on climate change will hurt Australia’s international reputation. Even more (61%) agree that Australia should be a world leader in climate action by doing more to reduce carbon emissions.

Half of Australians (50%) agree that Australia needs to help vulnerable peoples and developing countries adapt to the negative impacts of climate change, and 43% agree that Australia should increase financial support for Pacific countries to deal with the impacts of climate change.

# Aim + Approach

## Who

The Australia Institute Climate & Energy Program engaged leading market research firm YouGov to conduct the quantitative and qualitative surveys for *Climate of the Nation 2023*.

## Quantitative

The quantitative online survey was conducted on the YouGov Galaxy Online Omnibus between 16 and 23 June 2023.

The sample comprises 2,089 Australians aged 18 years and older distributed throughout Australia, as follows:

State	Sample size	Margin of error
NSW	667	±3.99%
VIC	536	±4.41%
QLD	426	±5.03%
SA	144	±8.34%
WA	215	±7.17%
TAS, NT, ACT	311	±11.10%

Age, gender, and location quotas were applied to the sample, and post-survey data was weighted by age, gender, and location to reflect the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population estimates.

Respondents were classified as residents of either capital cities or regional areas. In this context, the term “capital cities” refers to Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, and Canberra.

Respondents were also classified as either culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) or not culturally and linguistically diverse (non-CALD). The CALD group includes those who identify as having ancestry that is not white Australian or European, those who speak a language other than English at home, and those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.

The overall margin of error is ±2.26%.

YouGov is a member of the Australian Polling Council and complies with its Code of Conduct as it pertains to the public release of polling data. The purpose of this Code is to increase public confidence through greater transparency.



# Attitudes Towards Climate Change

Climate of the Nation 2023 shows that while Australians have been forced to focus inwards as a result of the cost-of-living crisis, this has only marginally decreased their concern about climate change. Climate concern remains just shy of the all-time highs recorded in 2021 and 2022.

## Near consensus that climate change is occurring

In results similar to last year, 77% of Australians believe climate change is occurring, compared to 12% who do not believe this (11% don't know or are not sure). Belief in climate change decreases with age, with more young people than ever (92% of those aged 18-24) who think climate change is occurring (5% do not), compared to 67% of those aged over 65 who think climate change is occurring (16% do not).

Australians who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) are also more likely to believe climate change is occurring (83%) compared to those who are not (74%).

FIGURE 1.1

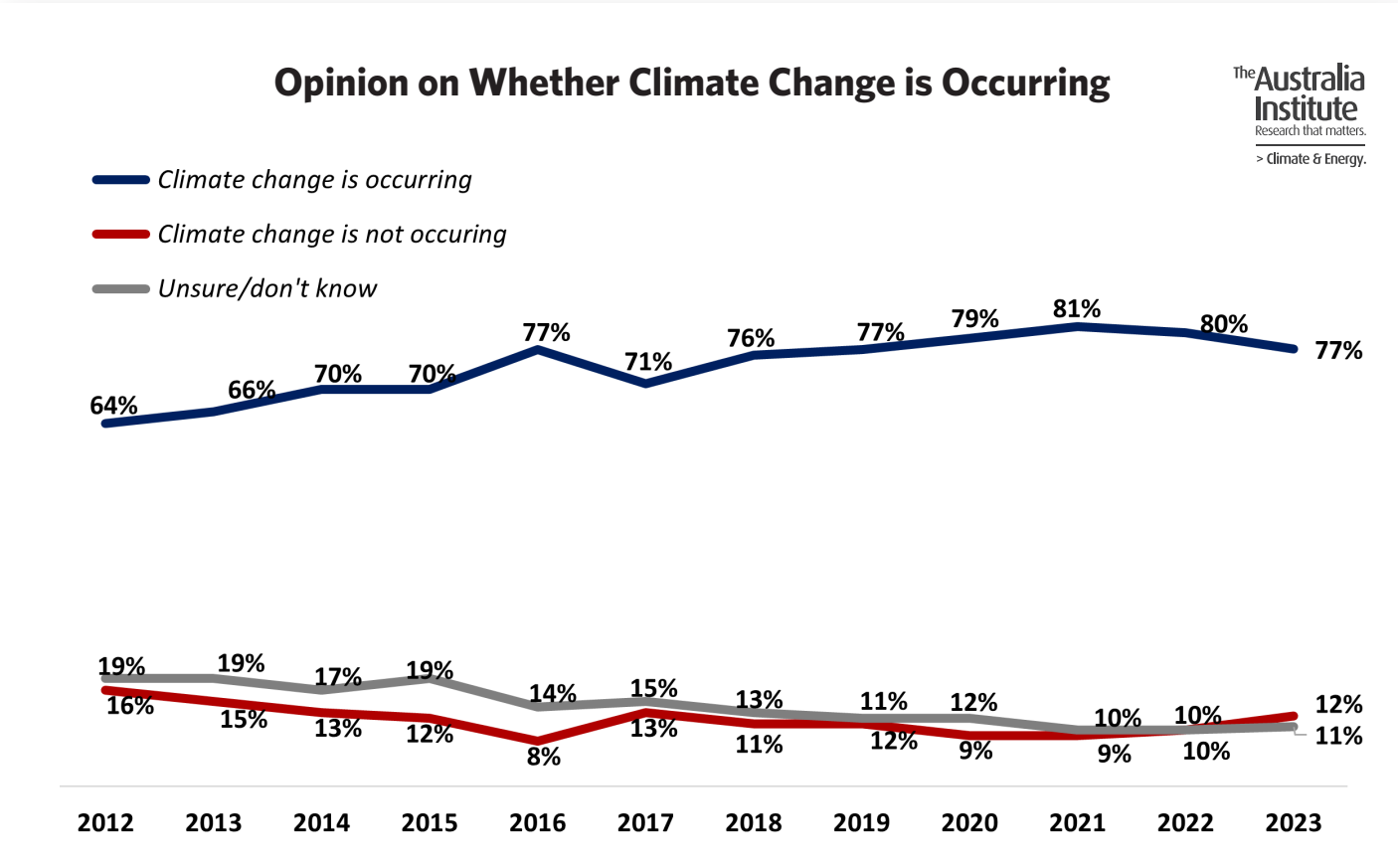
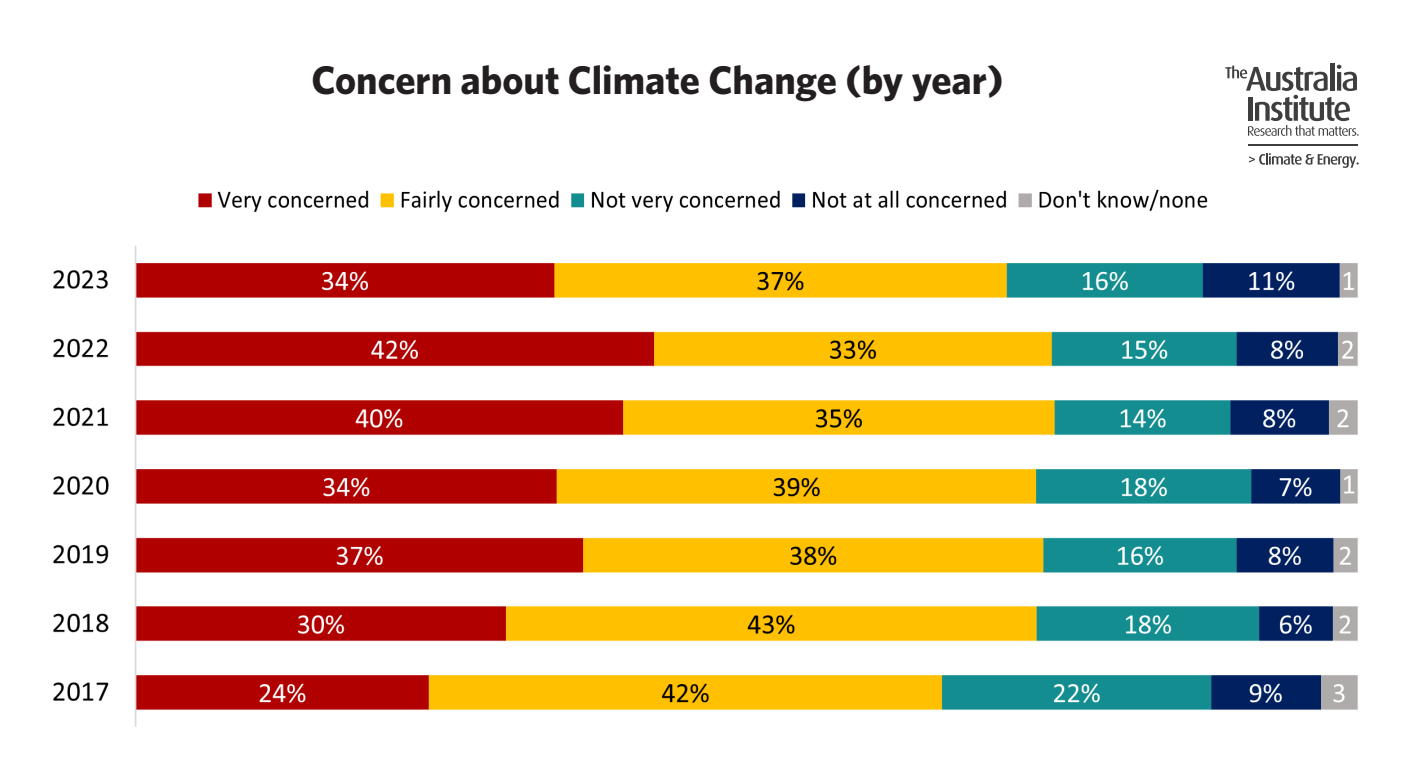


FIGURE 1.2



Climate concern remains high despite cost-of-living crisis

Concern about climate change remains high—nearly three in four (71%) Australians are concerned about climate change. Just one in five Australians (27%) are not concerned about climate change, including 16% who are not very concerned and 11% who are not concerned at all. As in other years, younger respondents tend to be more concerned about climate change than older respondents. Of those aged 18-24, 83% are concerned about climate change, compared to 58% of those aged over 65. This pattern of concern declining with age may reflect that young people will have to live with the impacts of climate change for the longest.

Australians most worried about food supply, bushfires, and biodiversity extinction

When asked about specific impacts of climate change, the top concern among Australians is more droughts and flooding affecting crop production and food supply (80%). Concerns

around food supply are likely especially prevalent for Australians this year given the increasing cost of food. Three in four Australians are also worried that climate change will result in supply chain disruptions making it harder to buy necessities (75%, including 36% who are very concerned), and more expensive insurance premiums (75%, including 41% who are very concerned).

Given the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, it is unsurprising that *Climate of the Nation 2023* shows significant concern about climate impacts that could exacerbate the cost of living.

Following climate impacts on crop production and food supply, Australians are most concerned that climate change will cause more bushfires (79%), and more animal and plant species to become extinct (79%).

After three La Niña years mixed with climate change to cause devastating floods in 2021 and 2022, Australia is now expected to enter a hot, dry El Niño summer, ripe for bushfires fuelled by the dense and highly flammable understorey that has grown during these years of record rainfall.

Last year, the koala, one of Australia’s most iconic animals, was listed as endangered on the federal register.



FIGURE 1.3

## Concern that Climate Change will Result in the Following Impacts

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Very concerned Fairly concerned Not very concerned Not at all concerned Don't know/none

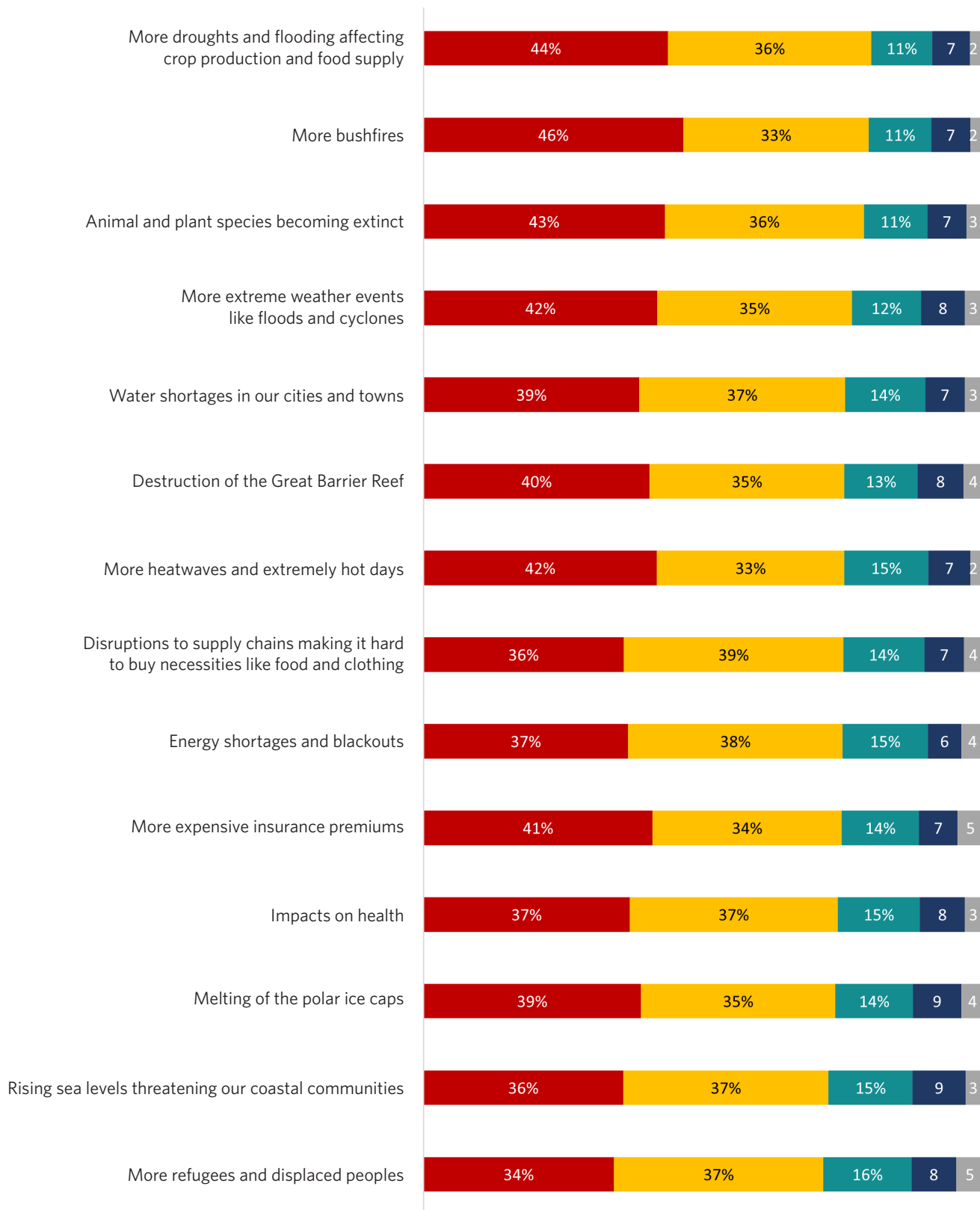
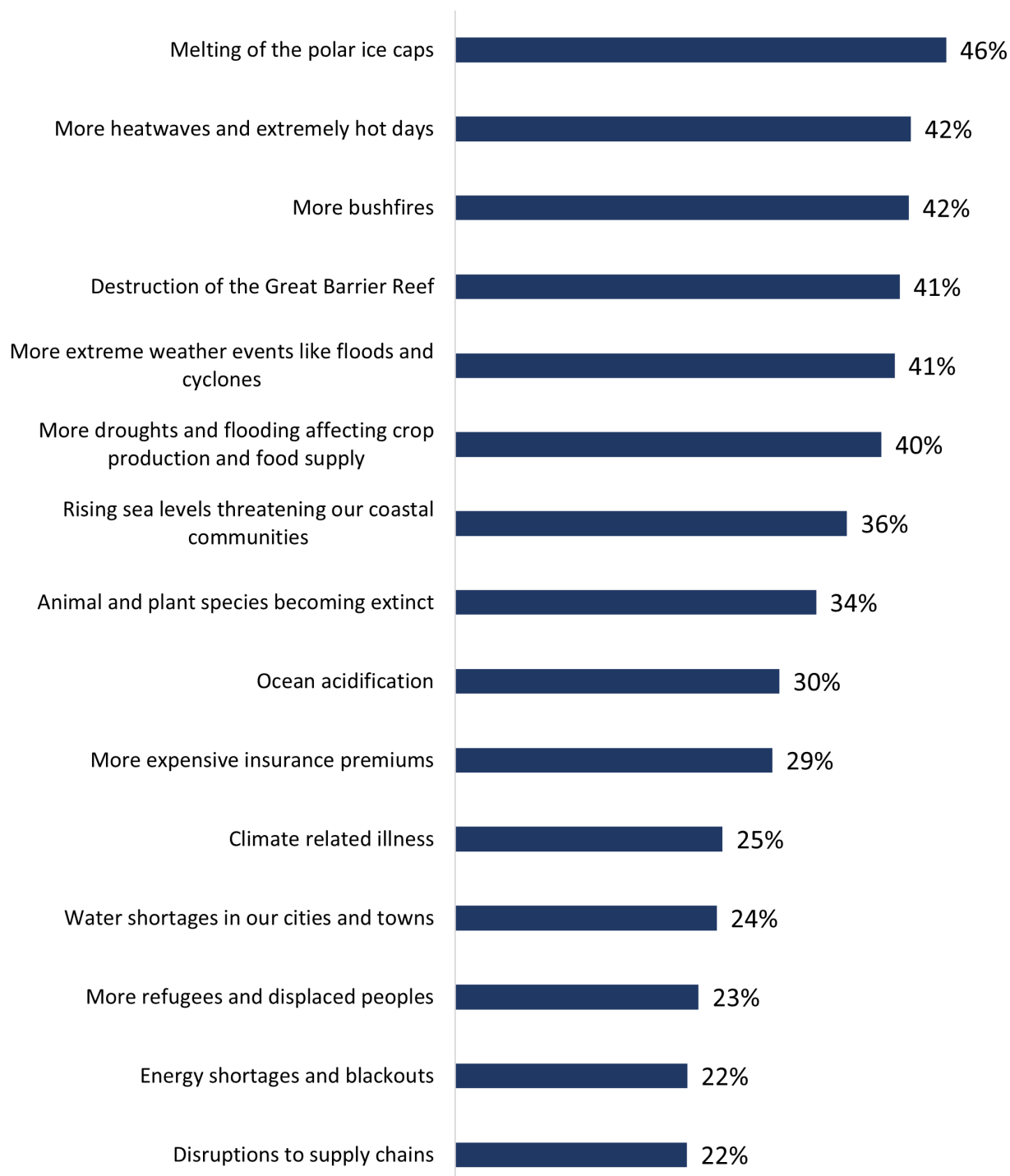


FIGURE 1.4

## Belief that Climate Change is Already Causing the Following Impacts

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## Australians are already feeling the impacts of climate change

Melting of the polar ice caps (46%), more heatwaves and extremely hot days (42%) and more bushfires (42%) top the list of impacts that Australians think global warming is already causing.

Of the cost-of-living impacts added to the Climate of the Nation survey this year, 29% of Australians think more expensive insurance premiums are already being caused by climate change, and 22% think disruptions to supply chains are already being caused by climate change. These responses likely reflect the impacts of the Black Summer bushfires and the east coast floods on the costs of both insurance and necessities for many Australians.

Interestingly, flooding is fifth on the list of climate impacts that Australians believe are already happening. 2023 was the third of three La Niña years, which caused major flood events and three cool, rainy summers in a row. The middle ranking of flooding on the list of climate impacts could reflect a broader misunderstanding of the impacts of climate change.

While Australians largely understand that bushfires, extreme heat, and the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef are climate change impacts, it may be a little less clear how cooler summers could be attributed to global warming.

## Conflicting opinions and exaggerated claims clouding climate judgment

Conflicting opinions and perceived exaggerated claims about the impact of climate change continue to muddy the waters when it comes to some Australians' attitudes to climate change.

Despite concern amongst most Australians about the impacts of climate change, 30% of respondents believe the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated (compared to 52% that disagree).

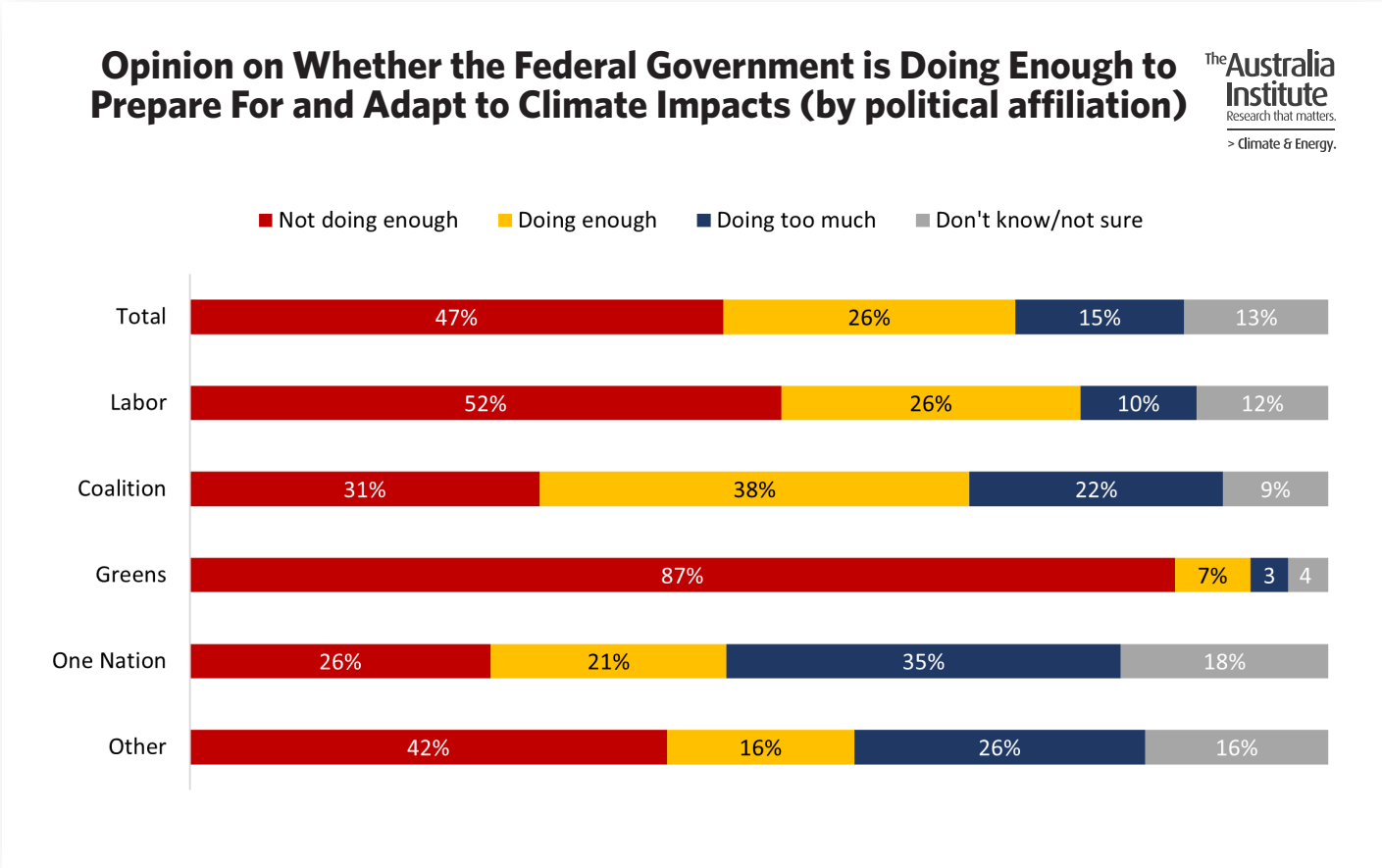
This perspective tends to line up with the political affiliation of the respondent. The majority (66%) of One Nation voters believe the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated, compared to just 12% of Greens voters, 21% of Labor voters, 33% of other voters and 47% of Coalition voters.

Almost half (48%) of respondents believe there are too many conflicting opinions for the public to be sure about claims made around climate change (29% disagree). However, most respondents (70%) trust the science that suggests the climate is changing due to human activities (compared to 14% that do not).

Younger respondents are more likely to trust the science (80% of those aged 18-24, decreasing by age cohort to 58% of those over 65).



FIGURE 1.5



Federal Government is not doing enough on climate change

About half (47%) of Australians think the Federal Government is not doing enough to prepare for and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Around half as many (26%) think that the Federal Government is doing enough, and just 15% think that it is doing too much.

Most women (51%) think the federal government is not doing enough on climate, compared to 42% of men. Women are also less likely to think the government is doing too much (10%) than men (20%). Women are more likely to select that they are not sure (16%) than men (9%) when asked whether the federal government’s action on climate impacts is enough.

Differences in opinion regarding how well the Federal Government is preparing for and adapting to climate impacts run along political lines. Most Labor voters (52%) think the Federal Government is not doing enough (26% think it is). On the other hand, 31% of Coalition voters think the Federal Government is not doing enough (38% think it is).

An overwhelming majority (87%) of Greens voters think the Federal Government is not doing enough on climate change, and just 7% of Greens voters think that the Federal Government is doing enough.

The 18-24 demographic has the largest proportion of respondents of any age group (66%) who think the Federal Government is not doing enough to prepare for and adapt to climate impacts. This is unsurprising, as young Australians will have to live longest with the consequences of climate change.

However, perhaps surprisingly, those aged 25-34 were the age group most likely to think that the Federal Government is doing enough to prepare for and adapt to climate impacts (39%). Similar proportions of Australians aged 35-49, 50-64 and 65 and older think the Federal Government is not doing enough (47%, 46% and 44% respectively).



**FARMERS  
NEED**

**CLIMATE  
ACTION**

# Australia's Climate Policies

Over the last year, the Labor Government—which was elected on climate ambition, among other issues—has made some steps towards better climate policies for Australia. The Climate Change Bill, enacted in September 2022, strengthened Australia's climate target to a 43% emissions reduction by 2030.

However, while this target represents a significant increase over the previous 26%–28%, it is lower than previous proposals of 45% by the Labor party during the 2016 and 2019 elections. It is also lower than what is required to limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5°C.<sup>6</sup>

The Safeguard Mechanism, designed by the Abbott Government, was reformed in 2023 to incentivise emissions reductions from some of Australia's biggest polluting facilities. However, the Safeguard Mechanism has been heavily criticised for allowing new gas and coal, and for its overreliance on carbon offsets that do not adequately reduce emissions.<sup>7</sup>

*Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that most Australians want more ambitious policies that address climate impacts and hold fossil fuel companies to account for their contribution to climate change. Australians do not want new gas, coal or oil. Australians do not want fossil fuel subsidies. Australians want the billions currently dedicated to such subsidies to be spent on new renewable energy projects, low emissions public transport, and large-scale batteries for renewable energy.

There is significant public support for a levy on fossil fuel exports to fund climate adaptation, a windfall profits tax on the gas industry, and a tax on businesses based on how much they pollute. As well as assisting in the energy transition, such policies would allow Australians to share in the profits reaped from public resources.

Australians also know that climate policy is not confined to the federal level, and see a leading role for state and territory governments in climate action.

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<sup>6</sup> UN Secretary-General António Guterres

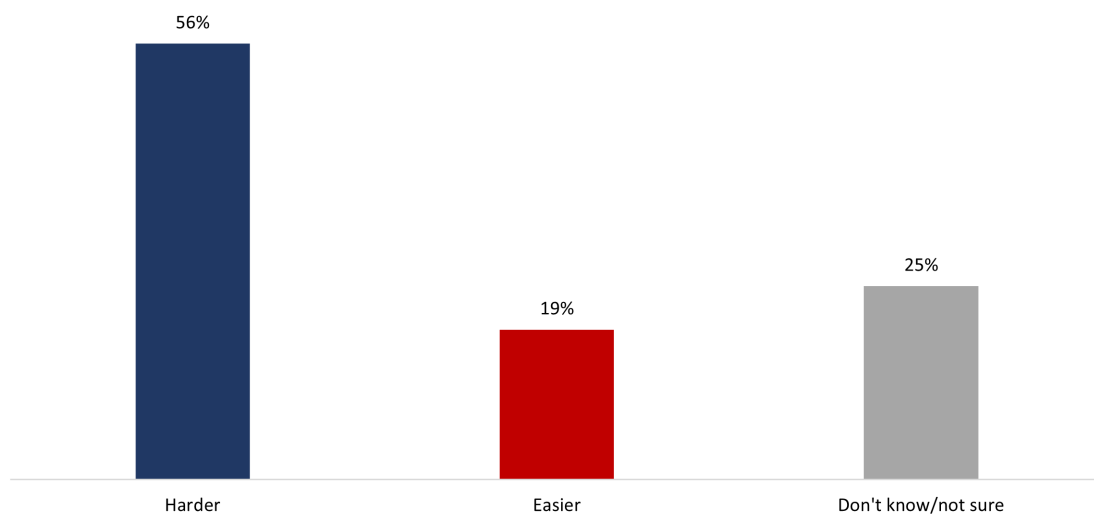
<sup>7</sup>Armistead et al. (2022) *Safeguarding fossil fuels: Submission*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/safeguarding-fossil-fuels/>



FIGURE 2.1

## Opinion on Whether Opening New Coal, Gas and Oil Projects Will Make it Harder or Easier for Australia to Reduce Emissions by 43% by 2030

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### New fossil fuel projects will make it harder for Australia to reduce emissions by 43%

In September 2022, the Labor Government enshrined its new emissions reduction target (43% below 2005 levels by 2030) in law.<sup>8</sup> When asked whether new fossil fuel projects align with this new emissions reduction target, the majority of Australians (56%) recognise that opening new coal, gas and oil projects will make it harder for Australia to reduce emissions by 43%. Only 19% think opening new fossil fuel projects will make reaching the emissions reduction target easier.

When divided by gender, more men (61%) than women (51%) know that opening new coal, gas and oil projects will make it harder for Australia to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 43% by 2030. While similar proportions of men (21%) and women (17%) think that opening new fossil fuel projects will make emissions reduction easier, women are much less sure (31%) than men (18%).

<sup>8</sup> Parliament of Australia (2022) *Climate Change (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2022*, [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_Legislation/Bills\\_Search\\_Results/Result?bld=r6886](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=r6886)

## Support for not approving new gas, coal, or oil projects

The International Energy Agency (IEA) pathway requires that no new fossil fuel projects be approved in order to avoid “the worst effects of climate change” by limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C. A majority of Australians (55%) support Australia following the IEA pathway—and thus not approving any new gas, coal, or oil projects—including 28% who strongly support this. One in four Australians (25%) oppose following the IEA pathway.<sup>9</sup>

Support for stopping the approval of new fossil fuel projects in line with the IEA pathway is strongest amongst younger respondents, and has grown significantly since 2022. Three in four Australians aged 18–24 (74%) support the government stopping the approvals of new gas, coal and oil projects in line with the IEA pathway, up from two in three (66%) in 2022.

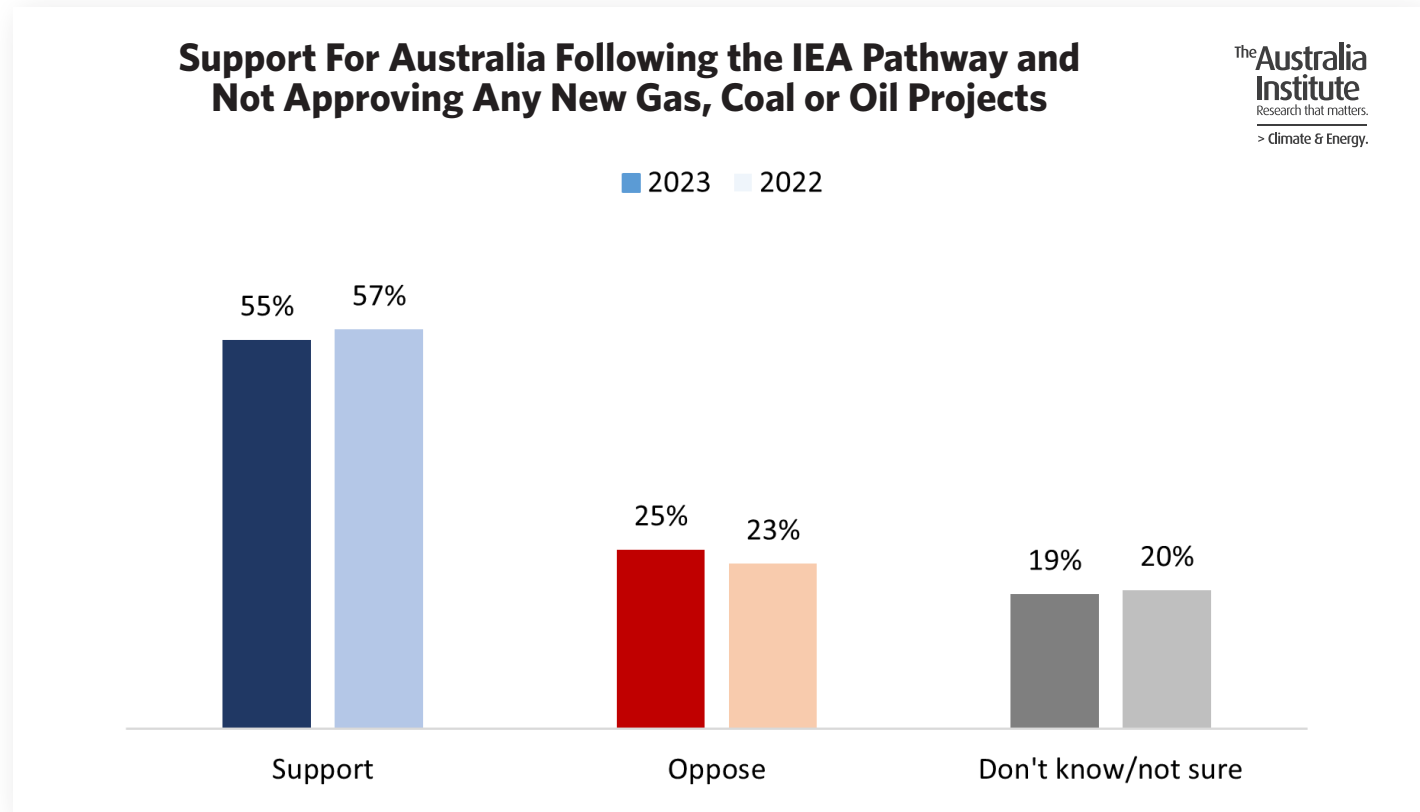
Support for following the IEA pathway decreases with age, with 71% support from respondents aged 25–34, 60% support from those aged 35–49, and 44% and 40% support respectively from those aged 50–64 and 65 or older.

While all states demonstrate majority support for following the IEA pathway, Western Australia stands out with 63% of residents supporting the government following the IEA pathway and stopping the approval of new coal, oil and gas projects (the rest range between 52–57%).

This may be a response to broad concern from civil society about Woodside Petroleum’s Scarborough gas project off the north coast of Western Australia, which is expected to emit 1.37 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions over its lifetime, 20% of which will be emitted in Western Australia.<sup>10</sup>

Support for following the IEA pathway is considerably higher among CALD Australians (64%) compared to non-CALD (51%).

FIGURE 2.2

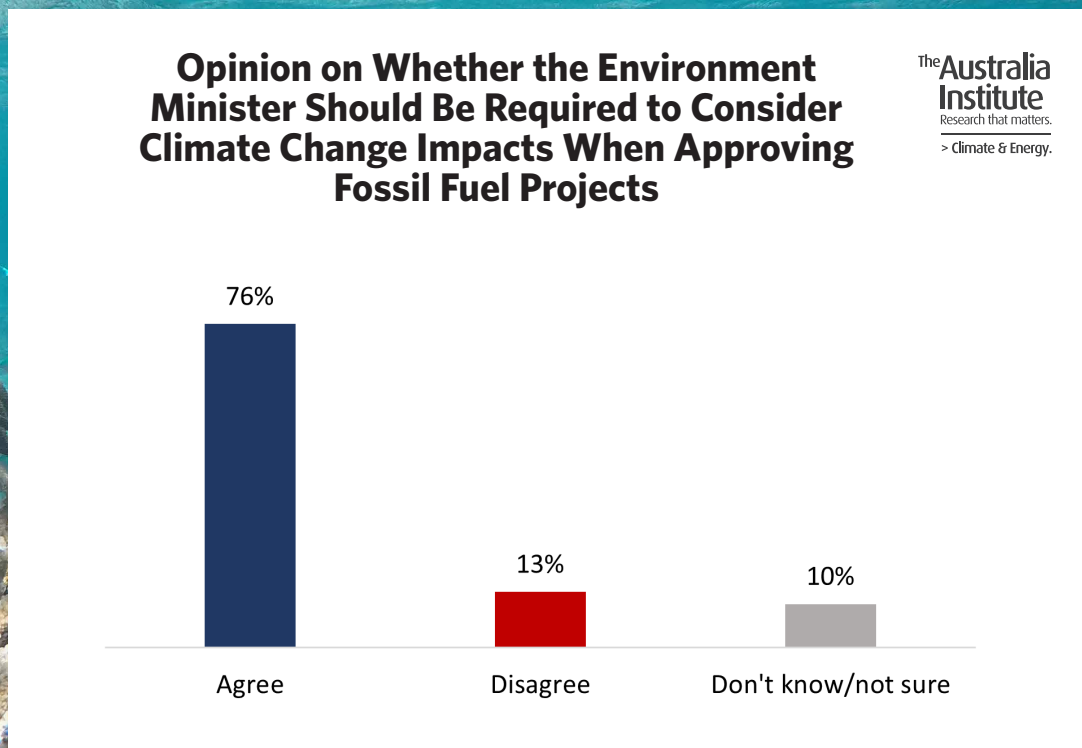


<sup>9</sup> Note: A similar question was asked in 2022. The wording has been changed slightly.

<sup>10</sup> Hare, Maxwell & Chapman (2021) *Woodside’s Scarborough and Pluto Project undermines the Paris Agreement*, <https://climateanalytics.org/publications/2021/warming-western-australia-how-woodside-scarborough-and-pluto-project-undermines-the-paris-agreement/>



FIGURE 2.3



## Climate should be considered in environmental approvals

The Greens have proposed including a “climate trigger” into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (“the EPBC Act”), Australia’s central environmental law.<sup>11</sup> Under the EPBC Act, a project must be assessed by the Federal Government (through the Environment Minister) if it is likely to have a significant impact on a “matter of national environmental significance”. Such projects include those that would affect world heritage properties, wetlands, and migratory species, among others.

The Greens’ proposal would see climate change included as a matter of national significance, allowing the Environment Minister to veto projects based on their climate impacts.

The climate trigger idea is popular with environment groups and civil society, who are increasingly putting public pressure on Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek to not approve new fossil fuel projects, given their contribution to climate change.<sup>12</sup>

When asked whether the Environment Minister should be required to consider climate change impacts when approving fossil fuel projects, three in four Australians (76%) agree, including 38% who strongly agree. Just 13% disagree.

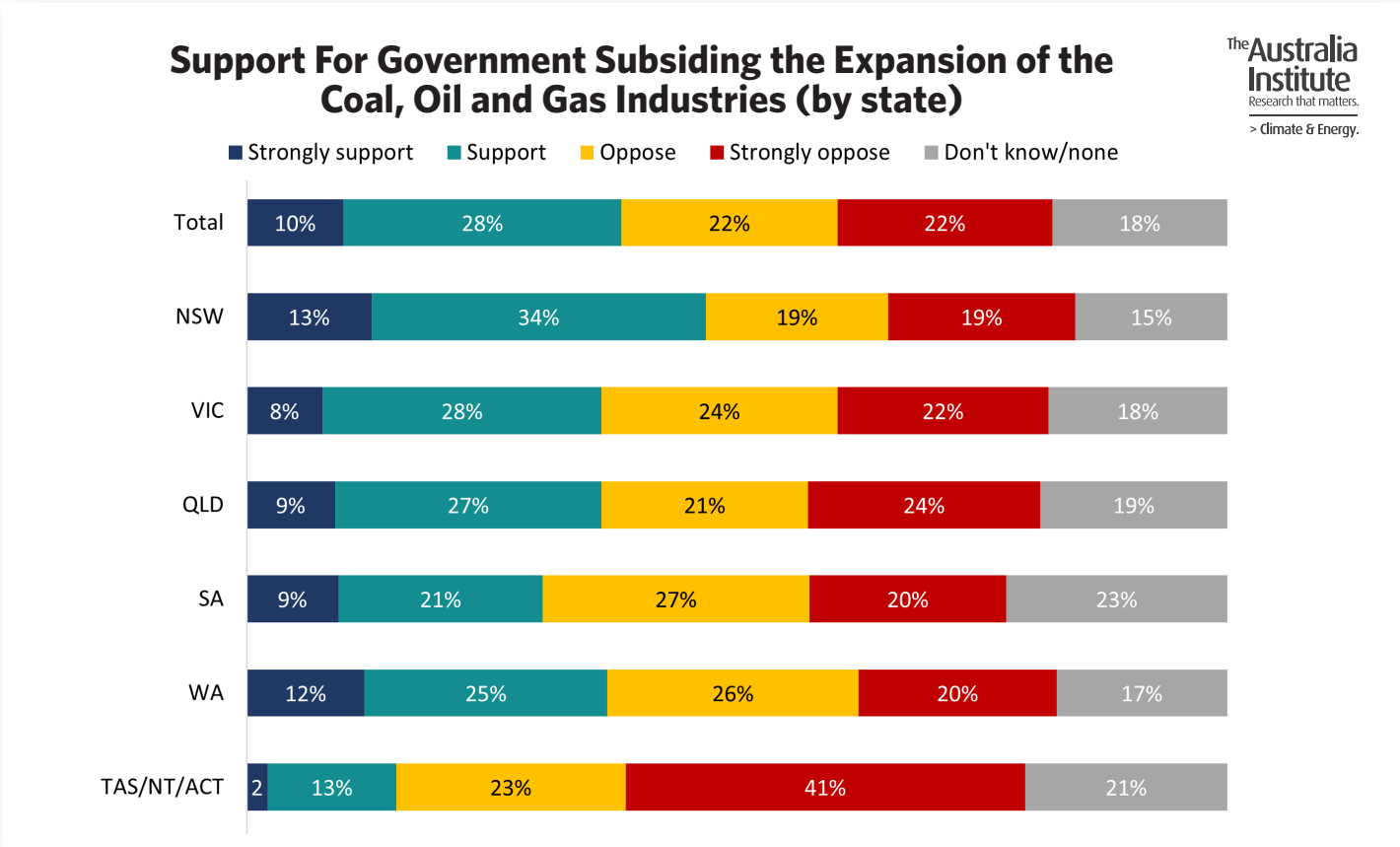
Agreement is strong across most political affiliations, including Greens (94%), Labor (85%) and Coalition (71%) voters.

While 50% of One Nation voters agree that the Environment Minister should be required to consider climate change when approving fossil fuel projects, 39% disagree—the largest disagreement from any political affiliation. Introducing a “climate trigger” into the EPBC Act would be an effective way to oblige the Environment Minister to consider the climate impacts of new fossil fuel projects.

<sup>11</sup> Parliament of Australia (2022) *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Climate Trigger) Bill 2020*, [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_Legislation/Bills\\_Search\\_Results/Result?bld=s1255](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=s1255)

<sup>12</sup> Foley (2023) *Environmentalists take Tanya Plibersek to court over coal mine assessments*, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/environmentalists-take-tanya-plibersek-to-court-over-coal-mine-assessments-20230605-p5ddyoy.html>

FIGURE 2.4



## Many Australians oppose fossil fuel subsidies

In 2009, along with other major economies that make up the G20, Australia promised to phase out “inefficient fossil fuel subsidies”.<sup>13</sup>

More than a decade after that promise was made, Australia continues to hand out billions of dollars’ worth of these subsidies: in 2022–23, the total value of subsidies committed to fossil fuel industries from Federal, state and territory governments was \$11.1 billion.

According to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, “investing in new fossil fuel infrastructure is moral and economic madness”, as these investments fuel catastrophic climate change and will likely result in stranded assets.<sup>14</sup>

Nearly half of Australians agree: 44% oppose the government putting public funds into infrastructure to subsidise the expansion of the coal, oil and gas industries, compared to just over one in three (38%) who are supportive of this practice.

Since last year, public opposition to fossil fuel subsidies has declined slightly (50% opposed in 2022), and support has increased (32% supported in 2022). While opposition to fossil fuel subsidies is similar between men (46%) and women (42%), men are more likely to support fossil fuel subsidies (43%) than women (33%).

Opposition to fossil fuel subsidies varies between states. Australians from Tasmania, the NT, and the ACT have the highest rate of opposition at 64%, while support for subsidies is only 15%—a record low. By contrast, support for fossil fuel subsidies has increased in NSW (from 35% in 2022 to 47% this year) and in WA (from 30% in 2022 to 37% this year).

<sup>13</sup> G20 Research Group (2009) G20 Leaders Statement: The Pittsburgh Summit, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2009/2009communique0925.html>  
<sup>14</sup> United Nations Secretary-General (2022) Secretary-General Warns of Climate Emergency, Calling Intergovernmental Panel’s Report ‘a File of Shame’, While Saying Leaders ‘Are Lying’, Fuelling Flames, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sgsm21228.doc.htm>



## Australians would prefer fossil fuel subsidies to be spent on renewable energy infrastructure

*Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that overall, more Australians oppose fossil fuel subsidies than support them. When asked about where they would prefer the \$11.1 billion of fossil fuel subsidies to be spent, the top responses were new renewable energy projects, low emissions public transport, and renewable energy batteries.

Half of Australians (50%) would prefer the money from fossil fuel subsidies to be spent on building new renewable energy projects. A similar proportion (49%) would prefer the government to provide low-emissions public transport, like electric buses, trains, and light rail powered by renewable energy.

Two in five Australians (40%) would prefer the government to spend fossil fuel subsidy money on building large scale batteries. A similar proportion (39%) say they would prefer the government to build and upgrade transmission lines to renewable energy zones.

FIGURE 2.5

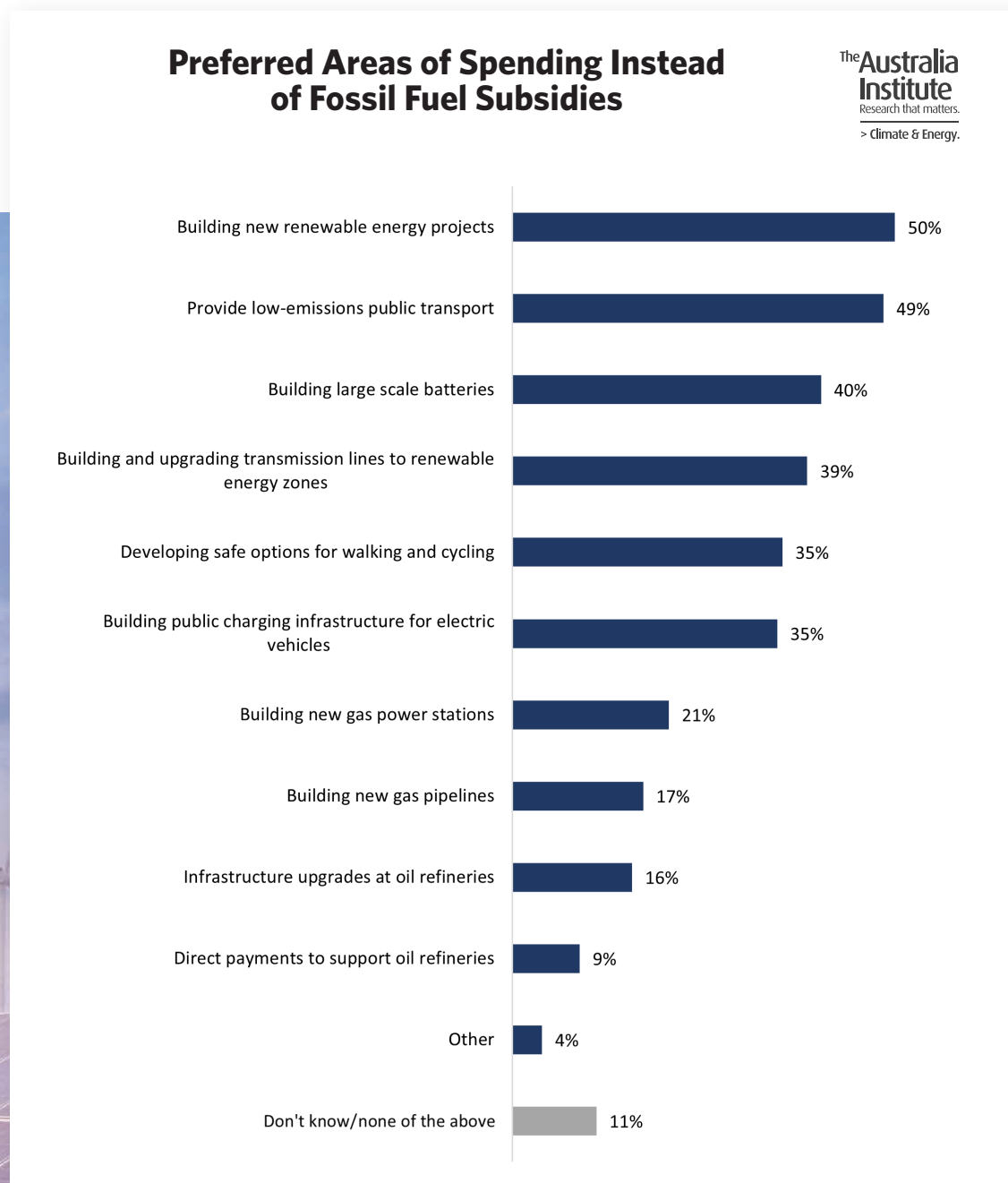
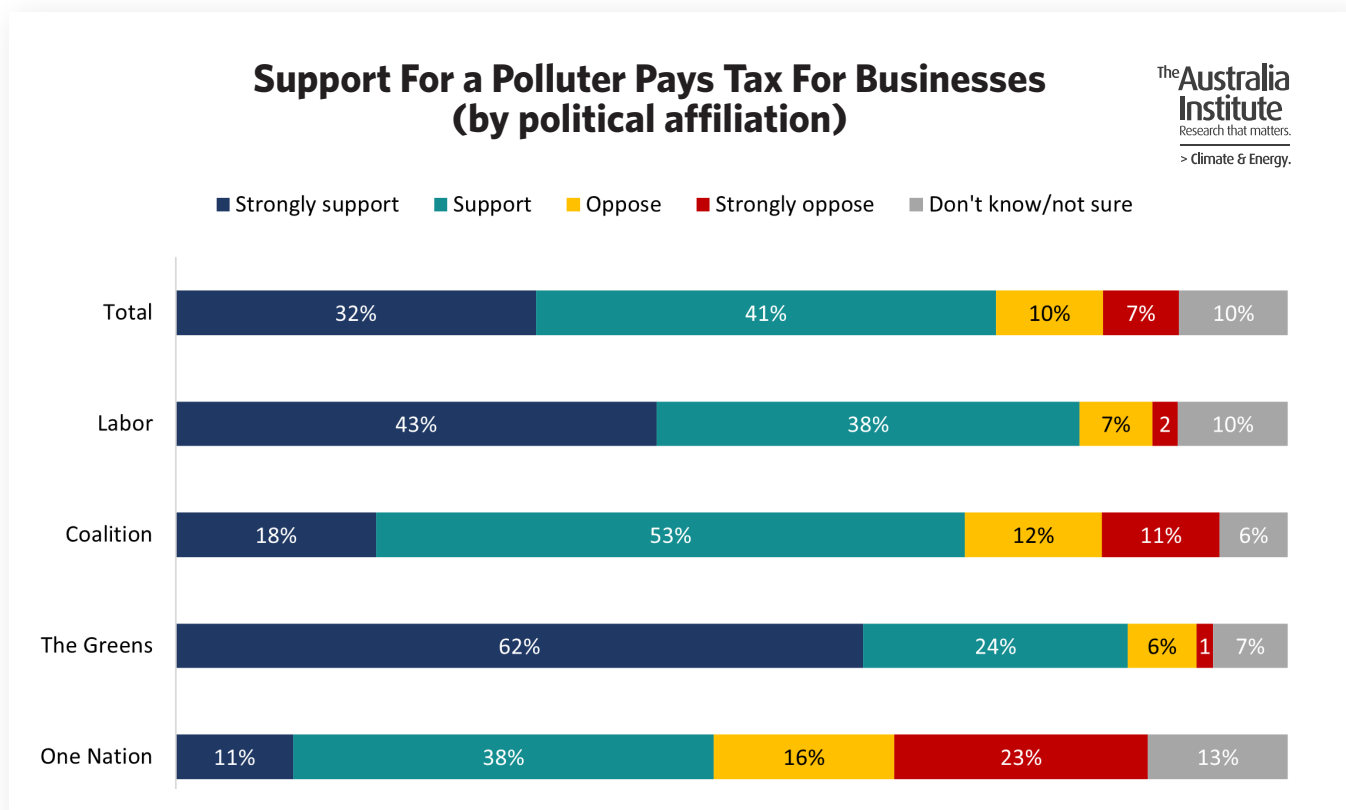


FIGURE 2.6



## There is wide-ranging support for a polluter-pays tax

The “polluter-pays” principle is a concept of environmental law that makes the party responsible for producing pollution responsible for bearing the costs of addressing the damage caused by that pollution. When asked whether Australia should impose a polluter-pays tax for businesses based on how much they pollute, three in four Australians (74%) expressed support, including 32% who strongly support the idea. Fewer than one in five (16%) Australians oppose it.

Support for a polluter-pays tax in Australia is broad across political affiliations: four in five Labor voters (81%) support the idea, as do 71% of Coalition voters, 86% of Greens voters, and 59% of voters who selected “other” for their political affiliation. The exception is One Nation voters, of whom just under half (48%) support a polluter-pays tax.

## Australians believe that fossil fuel producers should pay the costs of responding to climate change

Currently, the growing costs of climate-fuelled extreme weather events are borne by the Australian public. These costs manifest through property loss, disruption, loss of income, higher taxes and increased insurance premiums, as well as through impacts on physical and mental health.

When asked who should primarily pay the costs of preparing for, adapting to, and responding to the impacts of global warming, about half (45%) of Australians say that fossil fuel producers (such as coal, gas and oil companies) should pay the costs of responding to climate change.

This is similar to results from previous years (48% in 2022, 51% in 2021 and 50% in 2020 who said fossil fuel producers should pay these costs).

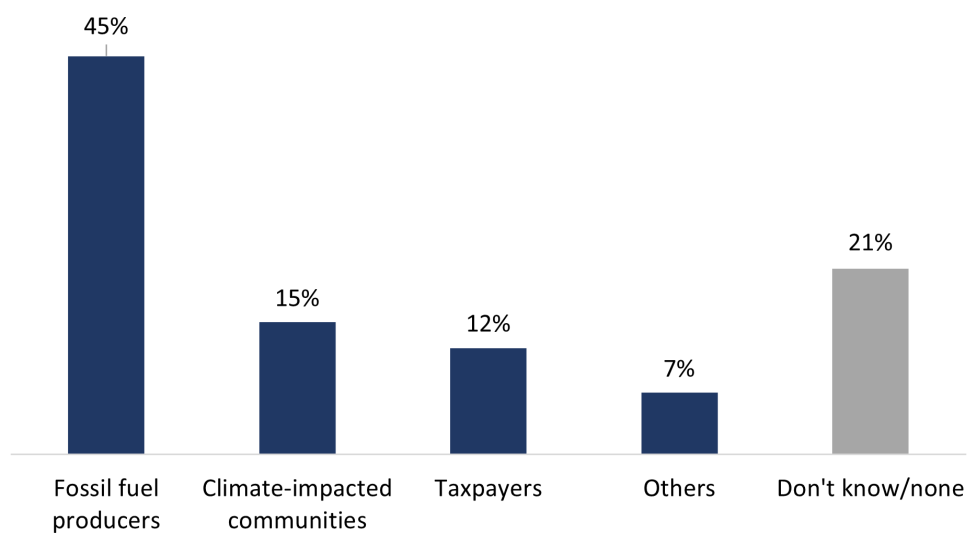
About one in 10 Australians (12%) say that taxpayers should bear the costs of preparing for, adapting to, and responding to the effects of global warming, and 15% say the burden should fall on people facing climate change impacts (such as coastal communities or those in bushfire or flood prone areas).



FIGURE 2.7

## Who Should Fund Climate Adaptation?

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# Australians support a windfall profits tax

Skyrocketing energy prices, sparked by increasing prices following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, have been a hallmark of 2023 and of the cost-of-living crisis in Australia.

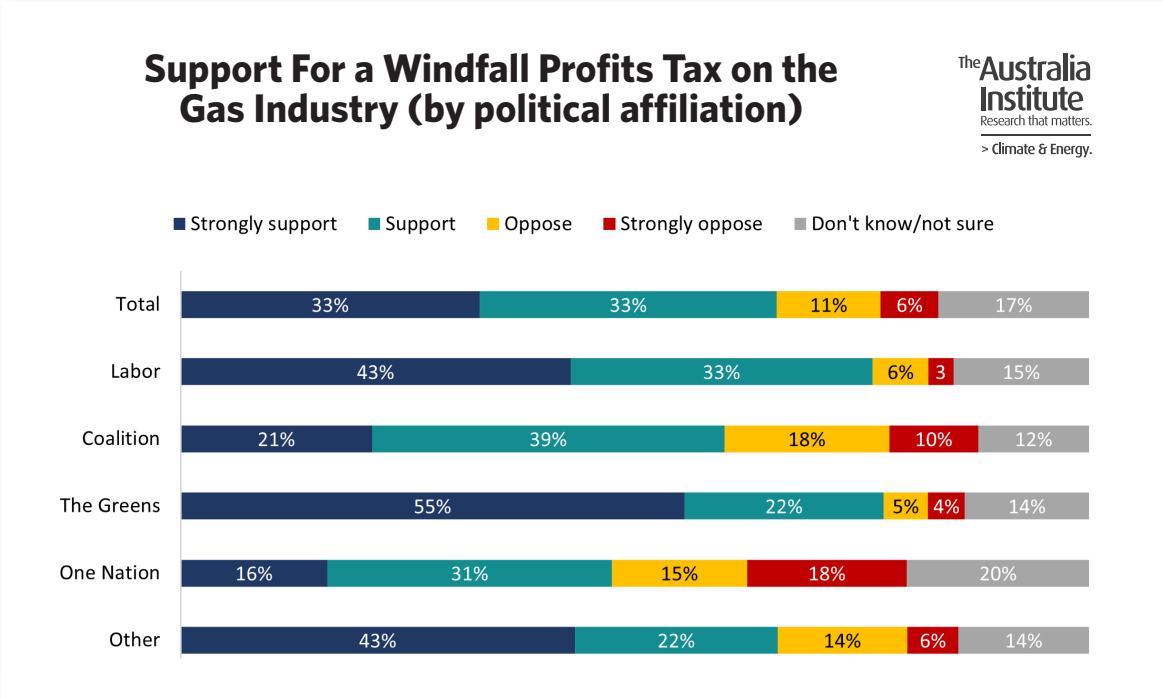
Australia’s gas companies have benefited from the increased value of their LNG exports, leading to windfall profits for those companies—and unaffordable gas bills for Australians.

Two in three Australians (66%) support a windfall profits tax—an additional or higher rate of tax levied on a company or industry when economic conditions result in unexpected profits—on the oil and gas industry.

Support for a windfall profits tax has increased by five percentage points over the last year, from 61% in 2022 to 66% in 2023—over three times as many as who oppose (18%).

Across all political affiliations, genders, ages, and states, more Australians support than oppose a windfall profits tax on the gas industry, with the highest support seen among Labor (76%) and Greens (77%) voters.

FIGURE 2.8



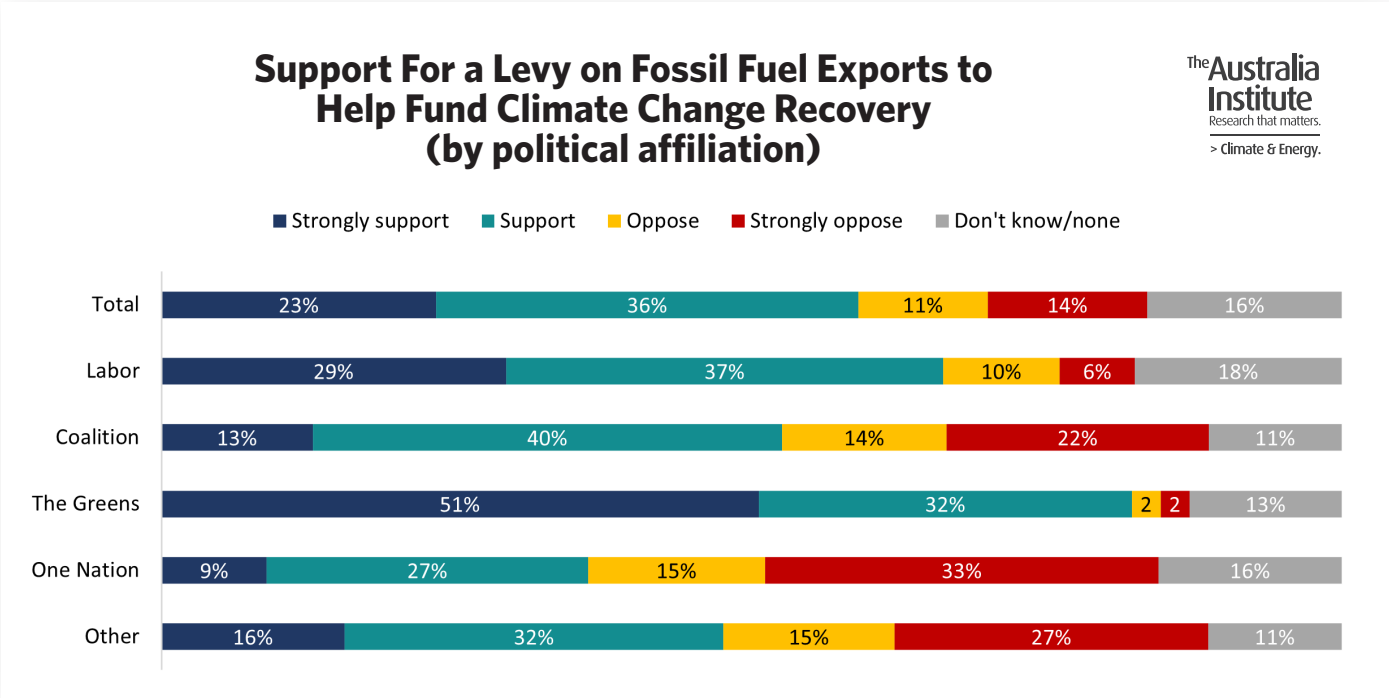
## Support for a levy on fossil fuel exports

The Australia Institute has recommended a National Climate Disaster Fund, funded by a levy on fossil fuel exports. This would ensure that those profiting from the main cause of climate change—fossil fuels—help contribute to the cost of mitigating the resulting damage, rather than leaving disaster-stricken communities to bear the brunt of these costs alone.<sup>15</sup> Damage from natural disasters currently costs the Australian economy \$38 billion a year and is estimated to increase to \$73 billion by 2060.<sup>16</sup>

The idea of a levy on fossil fuel exports is popular. Three in five Australians (59%) support the introduction of a levy on Australia’s fossil fuel exports to help fund local government actions to prepare for, and protect from, the consequences of climate change—a similar proportion to the 62% who supported the idea in 2022. Just one in four Australians (24%) oppose this levy, fewer than half as many as who support it.

Support for the levy is broad across genders, age groups, states, and political affiliations, with the exception of One Nation voters. Two in three (66%) of Labor voters and over half (53%) of Coalition voters support a levy. Support is highest among Greens voters, four in five (82%) of whom support the levy, and lowest among One Nation voters, half (48%) of whom oppose the levy.

FIGURE 2.9



<sup>15</sup> The Australia Institute (2020) *The National Climate Disaster Fund*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/initiative/the-national-climate-disaster-fund/>

<sup>16</sup> Note: This includes all natural disasters. Insurance Australia Group (2022) *Natural Disasters estimated to cost Australia \$73 billion per year by 2060*, <https://www.iag.com.au/newsroom/community/natural-disasters-estimated-cost-australia-73-billion-year-2060>

## State and territory governments should act on climate

Most Australians (67%) agree that state governments should take a leading role in action on climate change. The notion enjoys majority support in every state and territory, ranging from 77% in Western Australia to 63% in Queensland.

Two in three residents from NSW and Victoria (both 67%) and Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the ACT (66%) think that state governments should take a leading role on climate action, while seven in 10 South Australians agree (70%).

Residents of WA are in the most agreement, with nearly four in five (77%) agreeing that state governments should take a leading role. Two in three (67%) of NSW residents agree, similar to 2022 (68%). Tasmania has some of the most ambitious climate policies in Australia (including high renewable targets and net zero commitments), and two in three residents from Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the ACT agree that state governments should take a leading role on climate.<sup>17</sup>

Victoria, which also boasts ambitious climate policies,<sup>18</sup> has experienced a slight decline in agreement that state governments should act on climate, down four percentage points from last year to 67% in 2023.

## Regional Australia perceived to benefit from climate action

Much of the fossil fuel industry underpins its claims of being indispensable with the idea that it supports regional economies through investment and employment. However, Australians see that climate action presents opportunities in the regions.

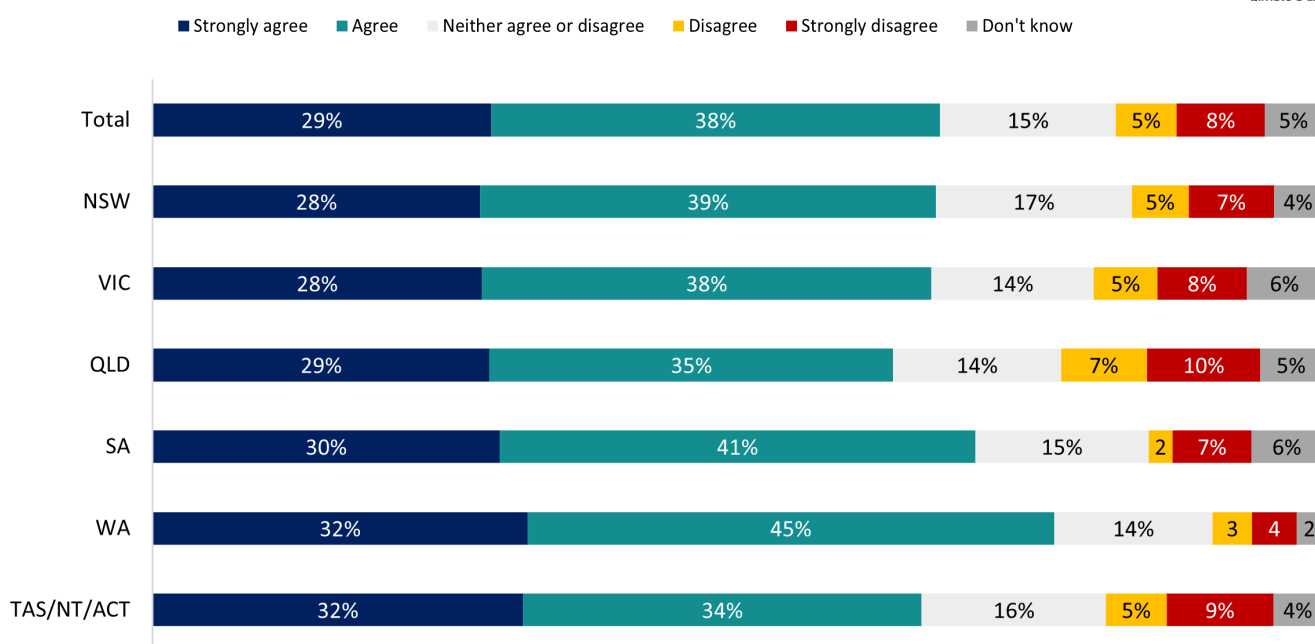
Two in three Australians (64%) agree that tackling climate change creates opportunities in regional Australia for new jobs and investment. Younger respondents are more likely to agree with this than older respondents. Four in five (80%) of Australians aged 25-34 agree, compared to half (49%) of those aged 65 and over.

Additionally, while a majority of both regional and urban Australians agree with this, urban Australians are 11 percentage points more likely to agree (68%, compared to 57% of regional Australians).

FIGURE 2.10

### Agreement Whether State Governments Should Take a Leading Role in Action on Climate Change (by state)

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<sup>17</sup> Baker (2021) *Tasmanian Government aims for net zero emissions by 2030*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-13/tas-state-govt-aims-for-net-zero-emissions-by-2030/100535206>

<sup>18</sup> McCubbing (2022) *Victoria announces country's biggest energy storage target*, <https://www.afr.com/policy/energy-and-climate/victoria-announces-country-s-biggest-renewable-energy-capacity-target-20220927-p5blap>



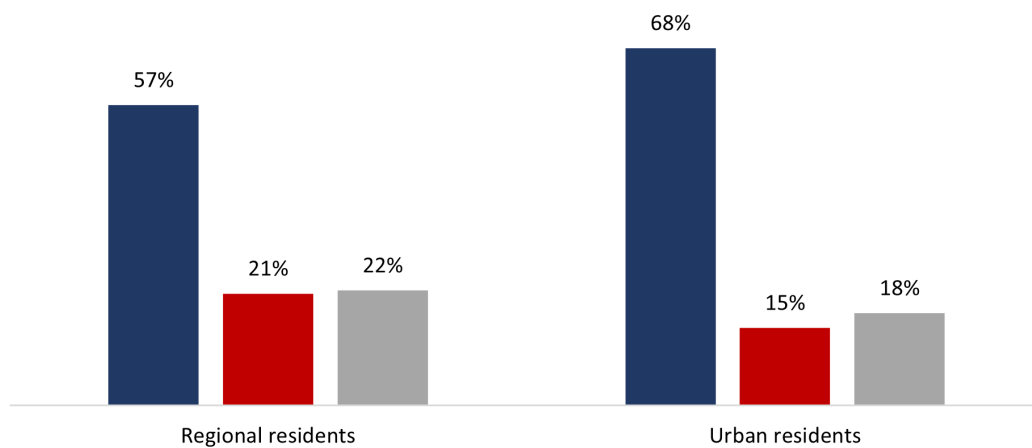


FIGURE 2.11

### 'Tackling Climate Change Creates Opportunities in Regional Australia for New Jobs and Investment' (by location)

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■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't know/not sure





# Climate Integrity

Last year's "climate election", followed by the legislation of the Climate Change Act, represented Australia's first meaningful steps on climate action in nearly a decade.

But *Climate of the Nation 2023* demonstrates that Australians are interested not just in whether climate action is happening, but in how it is happening—in other words, climate integrity.

The Labor Government, among other issues, was elected on climate ambition. Despite this, it has committed \$1.9 billion to a gas processing plant in the NT, and has approved the Safeguard Mechanism, which will allow new fossil fuel projects to proceed, as long the companies buy carbon offsets for some of their emissions.

The Government's annual emissions projections show that emissions from gas and coal mining will continue to increase to 2030.

Meanwhile, across the country, Australian governments have budgeted fossil fuel subsidies to the tune of \$11.1 billion.<sup>19</sup>

The Australia Institute has called for better regulation of "carbon neutral" and "net zero" claims, which are increasingly used by private companies to greenwash their images.

"Net zero" and "carbon neutral" claims are often pinned on loosely regulated solutions like offsets and speculative technologies like carbon capture and storage (CCS). But neither offsets nor CCS are a silver bullet: science suggests that these measures cannot mitigate emissions to the levels required to achieve real emissions reduction, let alone reduce emissions enough to meet Australia's climate commitments.

These are the troubling details that are becoming clearer and clearer in Australia's climate policies. An overwhelming majority (78%) of Australians think climate policy should be based on climate science, and most (56%) know that opening new fossil fuel projects will make it harder for Australia to reach its target of 43% emissions reduction by 2030.

For the first time, *Climate of the Nation 2023* has asked questions that aim to identify a set of publicly supported integrity standards for Australia's climate policies.

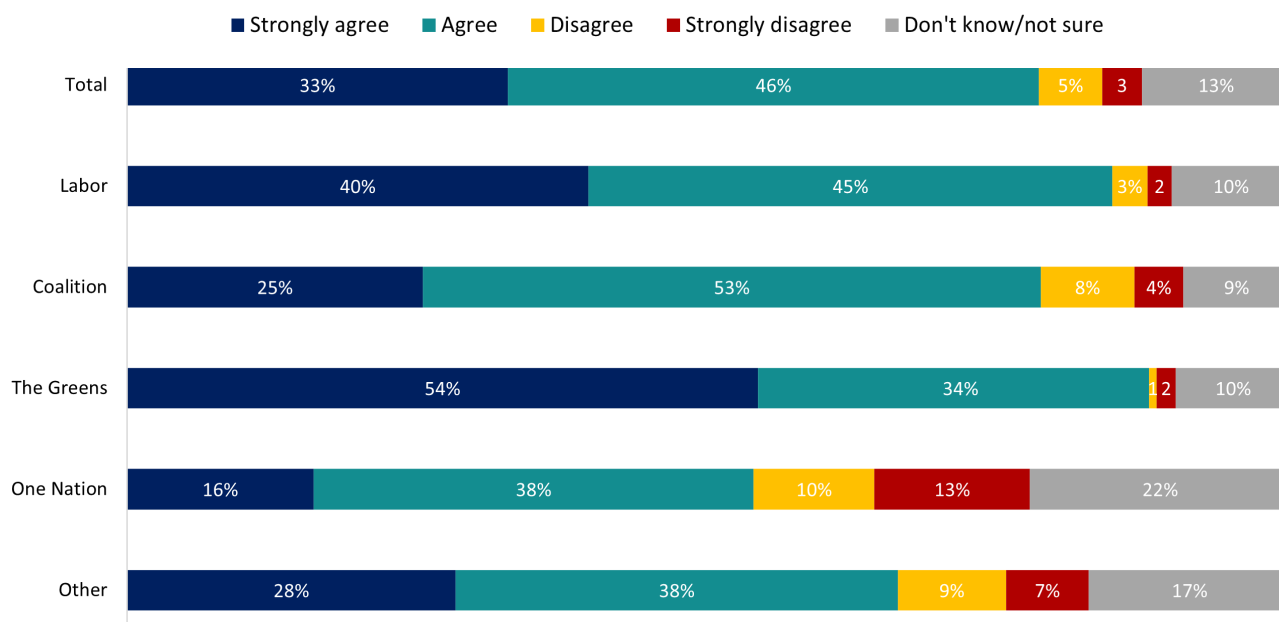


<sup>19</sup> Campbell et al. (2023) *Fossil fuel subsidies 2023*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/fossil-fuel-subsidies-in-australia-2023/>

FIGURE 3.1

## Climate Policy Should Be Based on Best Practice Climate Science (by political affiliation)

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### Policies should be based on science

Australia has long seen climate policy developed with little regard to climate science, and in 2023, an overwhelming majority (78%) of Australians agree that climate policy should be based on best-practice climate science. (Fewer than one in 10 (9%) disagree with this statement.)

A majority of Australians from every political affiliation agree that climate science should inform climate policy. Agreement is strongest among Greens voters, nearly nine in 10 (88%) of whom agree (2% disagree), followed by Labor voters, 85% of whom agree (5% disagree). Four in five (78%) of Coalition voters agree, but with a higher proportion of disagreement, at 12%.

Twice as many Australians disagree (57%) than agree (30%) with the statement "business interests are more important than climate science".

## Offsets are poorly understood

Offsets are increasingly being used by corporations who want to continue to release emissions while also appearing to reduce their climate impact. In theory, one offset represents one tonne of mitigated carbon emission via an emissions reduction project.

However, the methods for achieving this mitigation have been criticised widely. Activities that are currently eligible to create offsets in Australia include retaining vegetation instead of clearing it, capturing gas from landfill, and removing cattle from land.

The first method, in particular, has received significant criticism for allowing emissions to be released in exchange for farmers agreeing not to cut down trees on their land— trees that, in fact, were never going to be cut down in the first place.<sup>20</sup>

In January 2023, the Australian Government released its independent review into the integrity of Australian carbon credits.<sup>21</sup> It did not address the concerns raised by the Australia Institute and others that most Australian carbon credits do not represent real and additional abatement.<sup>22</sup> The review also failed to estimate the quantity of credits already in circulation. Dodgy offset methods such as these cannot be relied upon as an adequate route to emissions reduction.

Despite the widespread use of carbon offsets by corporations, only about half (53%) of Australians are confident that they know what a carbon offset is. One in three (32%) are not. Understanding of carbon offsets varies with age. Younger

Australians tend to be more confident that they know what a carbon offset is (56% of Australians aged 18-24, 71% of Australians aged 25-34, and 62% of Australians aged 35-49) compared to those over 50, fewer than half of whom are confident that they know what a carbon offset is (45% of those aged 50-64, and 35% for those 65 and older).

There is also widespread lack of awareness of the real emissions impact of offsets. *Climate of the Nation 2023* asked Australians whether they think offsets resulted in more emissions, the same amount of emissions, or less emissions being released into the atmosphere.

Fewer than one in five (17%)—the smallest proportion of respondents—could correctly identify that offsets result in more emissions in the atmosphere. One in four (22%) are not sure of the emissions impact of offsets, and three in five (60%) incorrectly think that when a business claims it has offset its emissions, the level of emissions in the atmosphere either remains the same or is reduced.

This is likely a result of successful greenwashing by corporations that underpin their “carbon neutral” or “net zero” claims with offsets.

FIGURE 3.2

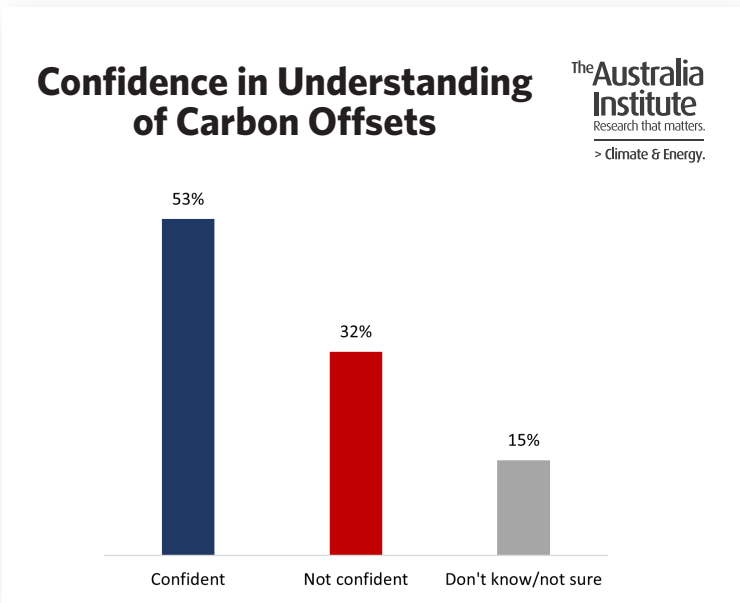
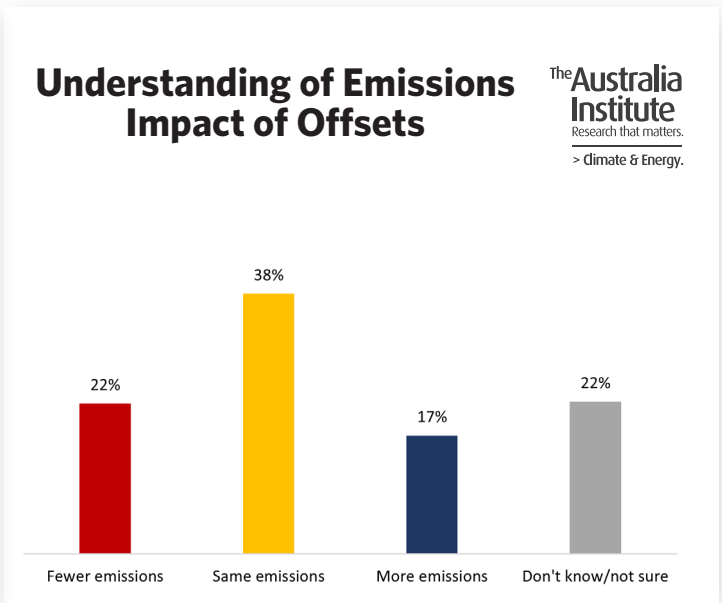


FIGURE 3.3



<sup>20</sup> Hemming, Merzian & Schoo (2021) *Questionable integrity: Non-additionality in the Emissions Reduction Fund's Avoided Deforestation Method*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/questionable-integrity-non-additionality-in-the-emissions-reduction-fund-avoided-deforestation-method/>

<sup>21</sup> DCCEEW (2023) *Independent Review of Australian Carbon Credit Units*, <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/emissions-reduction/independent-review-accus>

<sup>22</sup> Hemming, Armistead & Venketasubramanian (2022) *An Environmental Fig Leaf*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/an-environmental-fig-leaf/>



## Carbon neutral and net zero claims are poorly understood

Business claims of net zero and carbon neutral imply some form of climate ambition and emissions reduction. However, most Australians are unclear on how carbon neutral and net zero targets are met.

To assess Australians' understanding of such claims, the survey sample for *Climate of the Nation 2023* was split in two. Half of the respondents were asked to identify the best definition of carbon neutral from a list of five responses, and the other half were asked to identify the best definition of net zero. In addition to the five responses, both subsets were given the option to answer that they didn't know or weren't sure.

Two in five Australians (38%) know that an entity being "carbon neutral" means that its releases emissions, which are cancelled out by other activities like buying offsets.

However, a larger proportion—43% of Australians—selected an incorrect definition, including 17% who think carbon neutral means no carbon emissions are released. One in five (19%) selected that they do not know the definition of carbon neutral.

Net zero claims are even less clear. Just one in four Australians (26%) understand that "net zero" also mean greenhouse gas emissions are released but are cancelled out by other activities like buying offsets.

Most Australians (54%) selected an incorrect definition, including 27% who think net zero means no greenhouse gas emissions are released. One in five Australians (20%) selected that they do not know the definition of net zero.

FIGURE 3.4

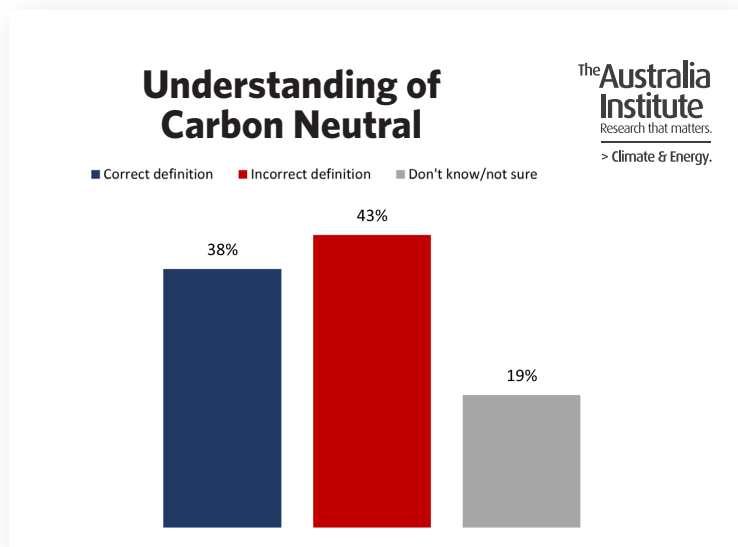
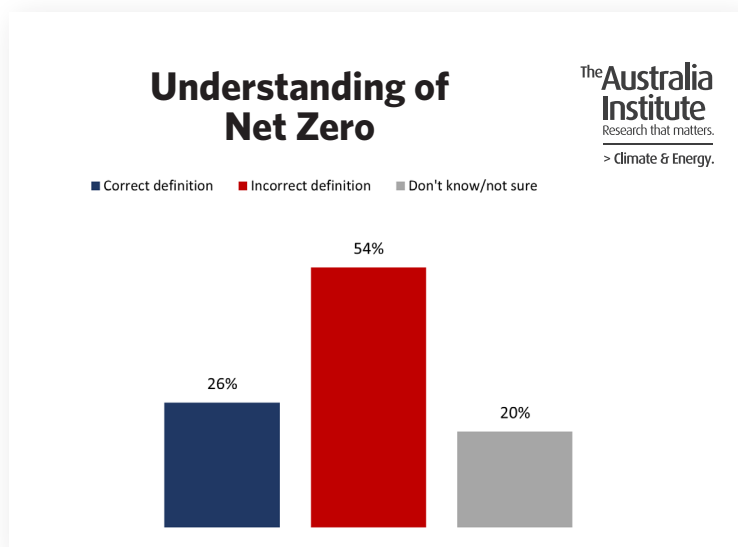


FIGURE 3.5





## **Governments should police net zero claims**

“Net zero” targets are regularly adopted by companies in high emitting sectors to deflect focus away from high emissions intensity and increasing emissions.<sup>23</sup> “Net zero” targets also rely heavily on offsets to achieve emissions reduction results, when emissions are actually increasing. Australia does not regulate the “net zero” claims of businesses.

Most Australians believe that it should be the responsibility of governments to verify claims of “net zero emissions” and being “carbon neutral” made by companies. Two in three Australians (65%) think governments should be responsible for checking the accuracy of claims, while only 5% believe that customers should be responsible. Fewer than one in five (16%) think it is the responsibility of companies to check the accuracy of their claims, and 3% say that no one should be responsible.

## **Carbon capture and storage promises not enough to allow new gas**

Carbon capture and storage (CCS) refers to technologies that capture carbon dioxide—from industrial facilities or directly from the atmosphere—and store it underground.<sup>24</sup> In theory, CCS technologies sound like an effective solution for emissions reduction—but in practice, such projects are inefficient and often only capture a small portion of the emissions they intend to. They also do not yet exist at scale in Australia.

Respondents were told that CCS claims to capture some carbon dioxide before it enters the atmosphere, and to store it underground. They were told that CCS does not capture emissions from burning gas and coal, and asked whether new gas projects should be allowed to go ahead on the basis of claims that CCS will be used to capture some of the future emissions from such projects.

The results show that Australians are divided over this issue: 39% say such projects should be allowed to go ahead, and 36% say they should not. One in four Australians (26%) are unsure of their position on whether new gas should be approved based on future CCS.

Australians’ opinions on whether new gas should be allowed to go ahead based on future CCS vary considerably with political affiliation. Majorities from Coalition (57%) and One Nation (63%) voters say that new gas mines should be approved based on CCS claims for future abatement. Over two in three (68%) Greens voters say that new gas should not be allowed to go ahead based on future CCS (15% say it should be allowed). Two in five (42%) Labor voters agree that new gas should not be allowed to go ahead based on future CCS, but one in three (30%) say it should.

<sup>23</sup> NewClimate Institute (2022) *Net Zero Stocktake 2022*, <https://newclimate.org/resources/publications/net-zero-stocktake-2022>

<sup>24</sup> Global CCS Institute (2022) *What is Carbon Capture and Storage and How Does it Work?* <https://www.globalccsinstitute.com/resources/ccs-101-the-basics/>

FIGURE 3.6

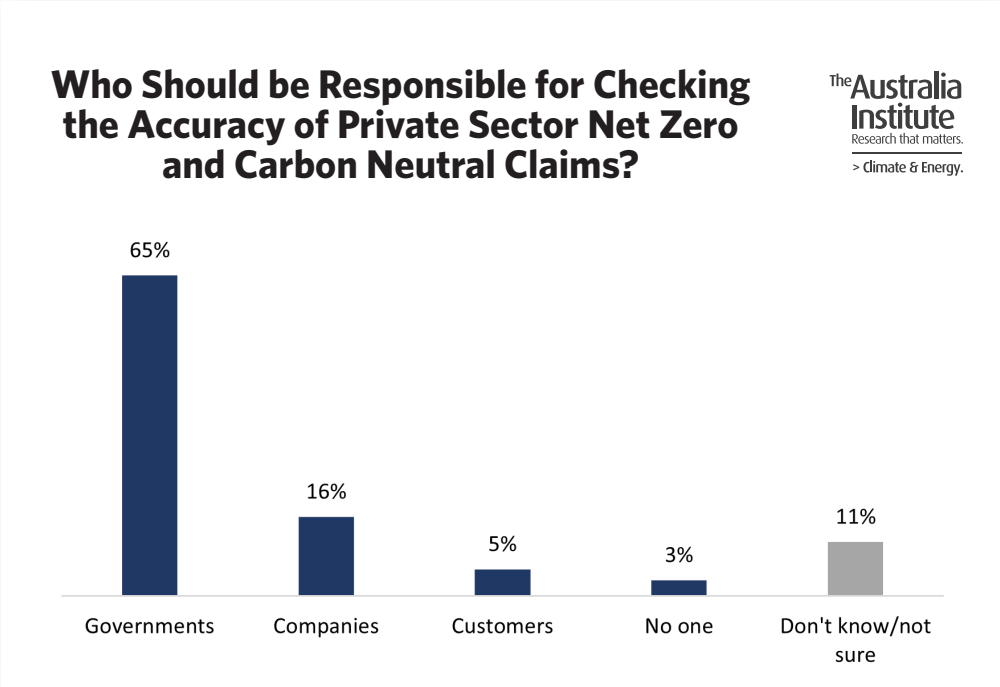


FIGURE 3.7

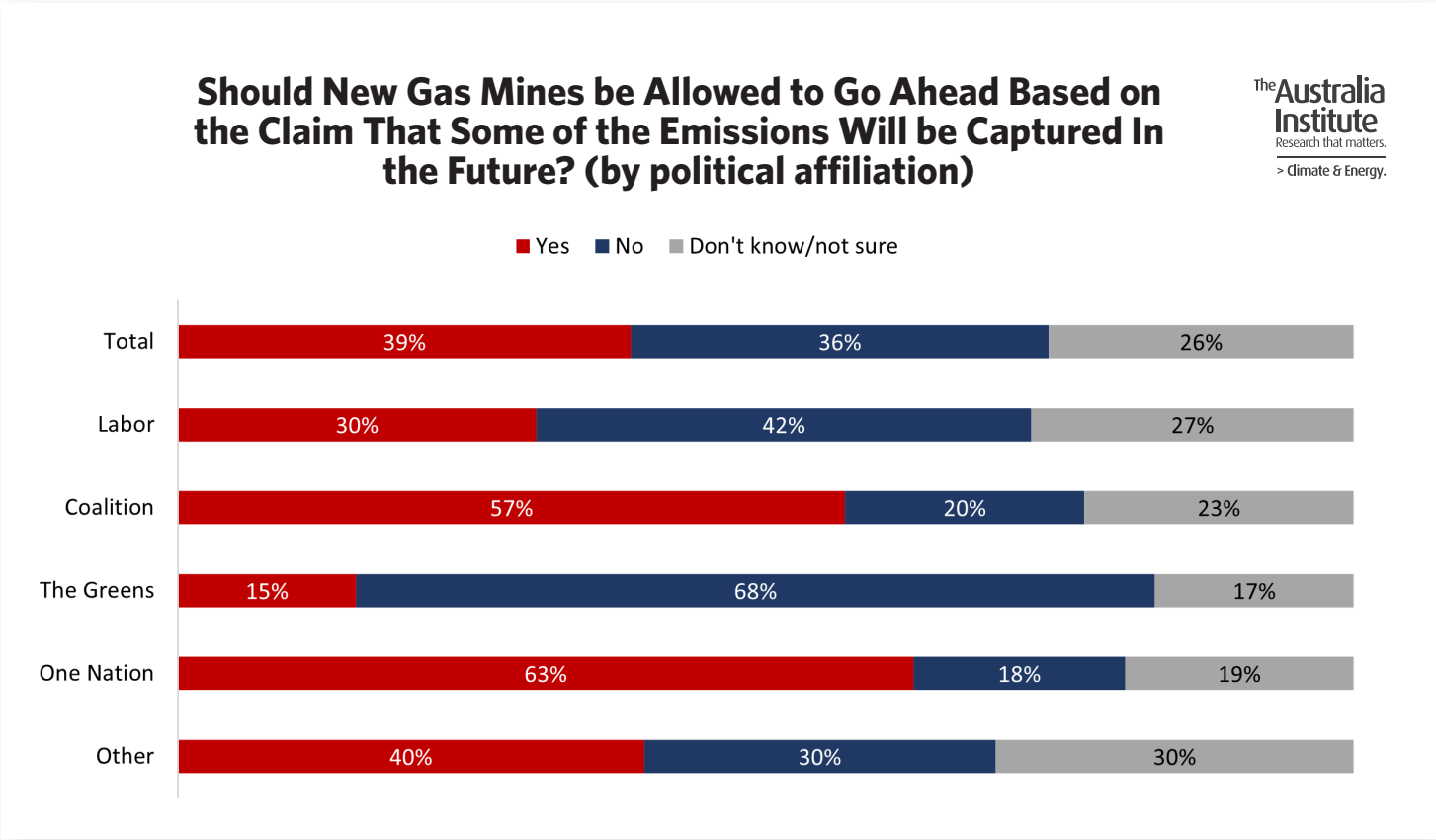
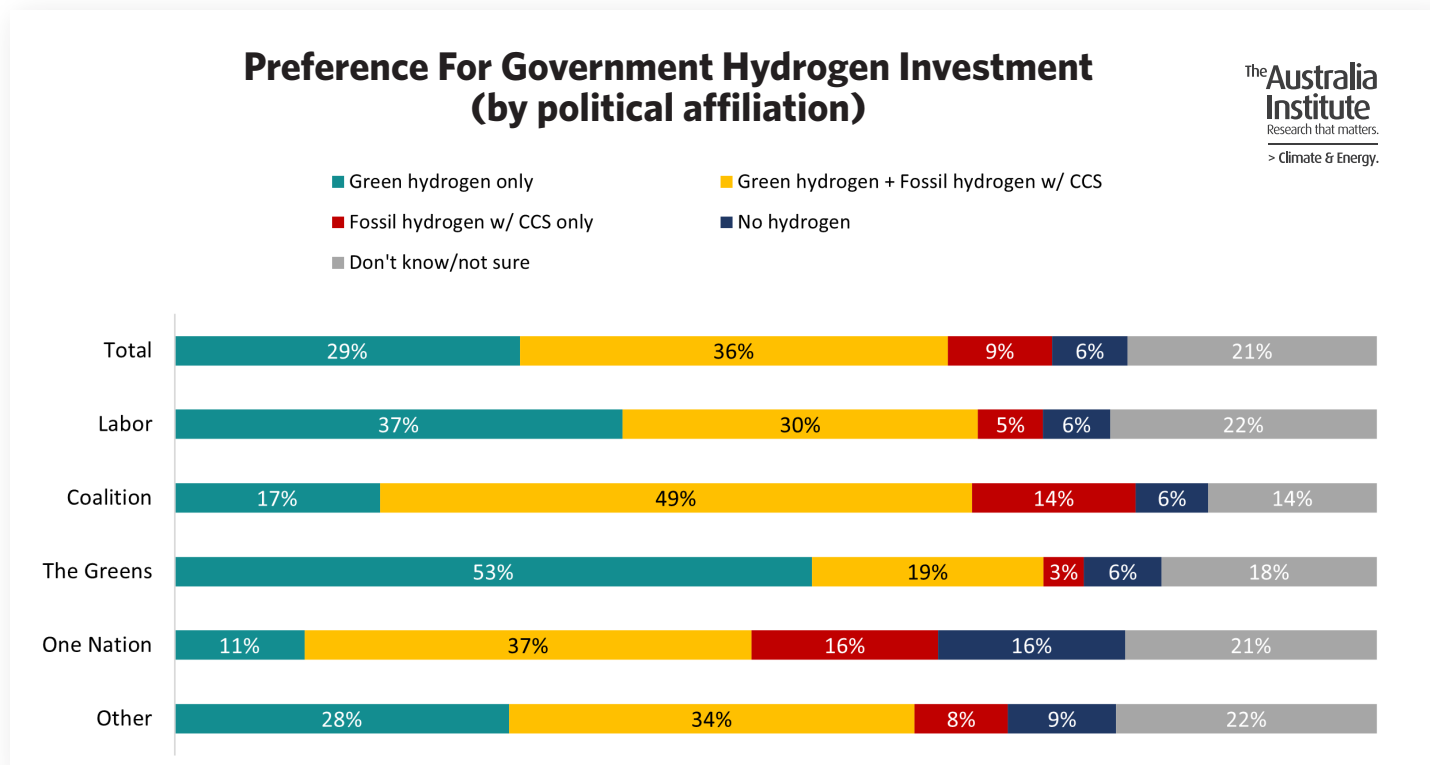


FIGURE 3.8



## Support lacking for government investment in fossil hydrogen

Australia's National Hydrogen Strategy aims to position Australia as a leading exporter of "clean hydrogen". Hydrogen can be used as a fuel that produces no greenhouse gas emissions from combustion, and water is the only by-product.

Unfortunately, the term "clean hydrogen" is misleading, because it refers to both green hydrogen—produced when water molecules are split into hydrogen and oxygen using renewable energy, which is a genuinely emissions-free process—and hydrogen produced from fossil fuels.<sup>25</sup> When produced from natural gas or coal, fossil hydrogen can create more emissions than burning the fossil fuel directly.<sup>26</sup>

While much of the "clean hydrogen" claims involve hydrogen production from fossil fuels with CCS, as discussed above, CCS is ineffective at adequately mitigating emissions. Previous Australia Institute polling shows that only one-fifth (22%) of Australians knew the previous Federal Government's definition of "clean hydrogen".<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps in response to criticism of previous clean hydrogen initiatives, this year's 2023 Federal Budget allocated \$2 billion for the Hydrogen Headstart program for green hydrogen projects.<sup>28</sup>

Australians are divided on the form that government investment in hydrogen should take. While 29% of Australians think that Australian governments should invest only in green hydrogen and not hydrogen produced from fossil fuels with CCS, 36% think that Australian governments should invest in both.

However, it is clear that Australians agree that if hydrogen is to be produced at all, green hydrogen should be in the mix. Fewer than one in 10 Australians (9%) say Australian governments should invest only in fossil hydrogen with CCS, and only 6% say that Australian governments should not invest in hydrogen at all.

However, when separated by political affiliations, opinions are stronger. While Labor voters remain largely divided (37% say green hydrogen only, 30% say green hydrogen as well as fossil hydrogen with CCS), half of Coalition voters (49%) say the government should invest in green hydrogen and fossil hydrogen with CCS, while over half of Greens voters (53%) say the government should invest in green hydrogen only.

<sup>25</sup> Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (2019) *Australia's National Hydrogen Strategy*, <https://www.dcccew.gov.au/energy/publications/australias-national-hydrogen-strategy>

<sup>26</sup> Ogge (2022) *Brown Coal, Greenwash*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/brown-coal-greenwash/>

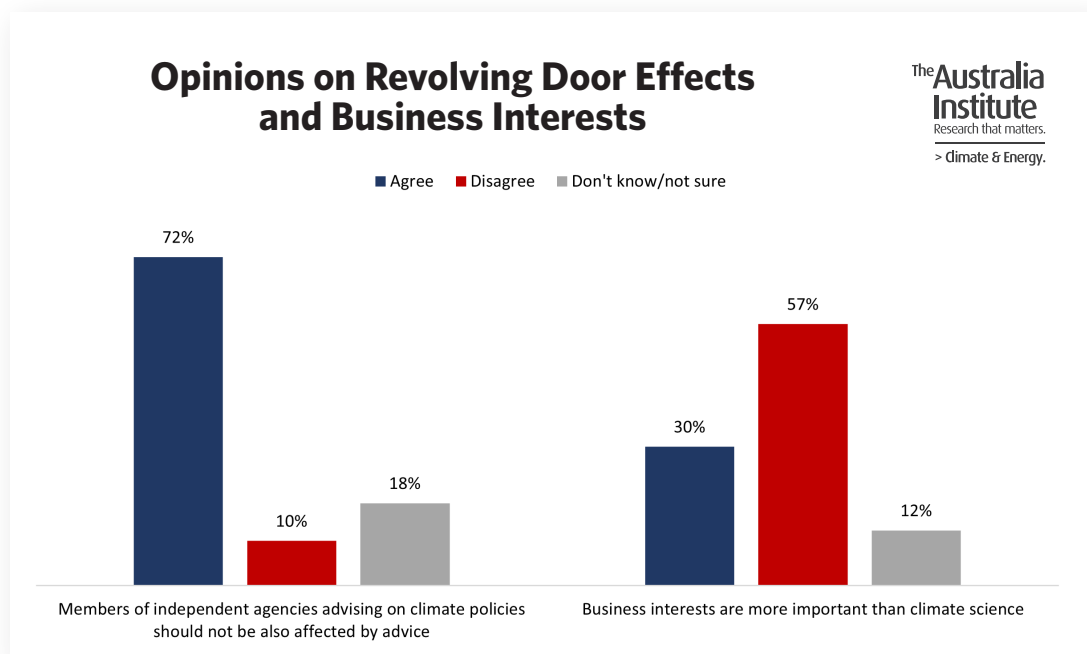
<sup>27</sup> The Australia Institute (2022) *Polling - What is 'clean hydrogen'?* <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/polling-what-is-clean-hydrogen/>

<sup>28</sup> Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2023) *Hydrogen Headstart program*, <https://www.dcccew.gov.au/energy/hydrogen/hydrogen-headstart-program>





FIGURE 3.9



## Climate policy should be independent

The 2022 election demonstrated that Australians are increasingly concerned about the integrity of Australia's governance. Integrity in climate policy is dependent on the independence and integrity of the agencies advising the government.

However, Australia Institute research has revealed the significant influence industry has on shaping Australia's climate policies, including the agency legislated to advise the government on its climate targets.<sup>29</sup> Several members on the board of the Climate Change Authority, Australia's key climate advisory body, have significant links to fossil fuels, carbon offsets and "climate change investment".

An overwhelming majority (72%) of Australians agree that members of the independent agencies advising the government on climate policy should not be also employed by companies or

organisations that could be affected by their advice. Just one in 10 (10%) disagree, while 18% remain unsure.

A majority of Australians (57%) also disagree with the statement "business interests are more important than climate science", indicating that Australians are largely supportive of climate policy being developed independently of business and in the absence of conflicts of interest.

Men are considerably more likely (37%) than women (24%) to think that business interests are more important than climate science. More women disagree (61%) than men (54%).

However, in an apparent contradiction, most Australians (57%) agree that it is appropriate for the fossil fuel industry to be involved in developing climate policy, while just one in four (27%) disagree.

<sup>29</sup> Hemming et al (2022) *Come Clean*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/come-clean-how-the-emissions-reduction-fund-came-to-include-carbon-capture-and-storage/>

# Australia's international reputation

The Federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Chris Bowen, said in December 2022 that “not acting [on climate] would be an unforgivable act of intergenerational negligence”.<sup>30</sup>

Our Pacific neighbours agree with him. In March this year, Ministers and officials from Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Tonga, Fiji, Niue and the Solomon Islands convened in Port Vila to call for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty and a just transition to a fossil fuel free Pacific.

In reference to Australia's plans to bid to co-host the 31st Conference of the Parties to the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP31) in partnership with the Pacific, the Honorable Steve Paeniu—Minister of Finance and Development of Tuvalu—said, “We would only agree to [hosting COP31 with Australia] if Australia were to come on board and support the priorities of the Pacific on climate change. This is inclusive of fossil fuel.”<sup>31</sup>

Australia's current climate policies do not put a halt to fossil fuel expansion. Three in five Australians (61%) agree that Australia should be a world leader in climate action, by doing more to reduce carbon emissions.

## Australia's climate obligations

Respondents were asked a number of questions about the role that Australia should play on the international stage to combat climate change.

Three in five Australians (61%) agree that Australia should be a world leader in climate action, and should be doing more to reduce carbon emissions. Agreement is considerably higher amongst those aged 18-24 (75%) than those aged over 65 (47%).

Twice as many Australians disagree (54%) than agree (26%) that Australia should ignore the emissions impact of its coal and gas exports. Three times as many Australians agree (55%) than disagree (18%) that continued inaction on climate change will hurt Australia's international reputation.

Half of Australians (50%) agree that Australia needs to help vulnerable peoples and developing countries adapt to the negative impacts of climate change—more than twice as many as who disagree (20%).

Agreement that Australia should help developing nations is higher among CALD Australians (61%) than other Australians (44%). A majority of both Labor (60%) and Greens voters (75%) also agree that Australia should help vulnerable peoples and developing countries adapt to climate change, compared to 39% of Coalition voters (25% disagree), 25% of One Nation voters (52% disagree) and 33% of other voters (34% disagree).

More Australians agree (43%) than disagree (25%) that Australia should increase financial support for Pacific countries to deal with the impacts of climate change.

Again, CALD Australians agree with Australia increasing its support for Pacific countries more than other Australians (56% compared to 36%).

While a majority of Greens voters agree with increasing support for Pacific nations (65%), a majority of One Nation voters disagree (56%). About half of Labor voters (48%) and about two in five Coalition voters (39%) agree with increasing financial climate support for Pacific nations.

<sup>30</sup> Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Chris Bowen (2022) *Annual Climate Change Statement to Parliament*, <https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/bowen/speeches/annual-climate-change-statement-parliament>  
<sup>31</sup> Hon Seve Paeniu (2023) *Webinar: Climate Change and the Pacific: Regional Climate Diplomacy Forum 2023*, <https://australianinstitute.org.au/event/pacific-regional-climate-diplomacy-forum-2023/>

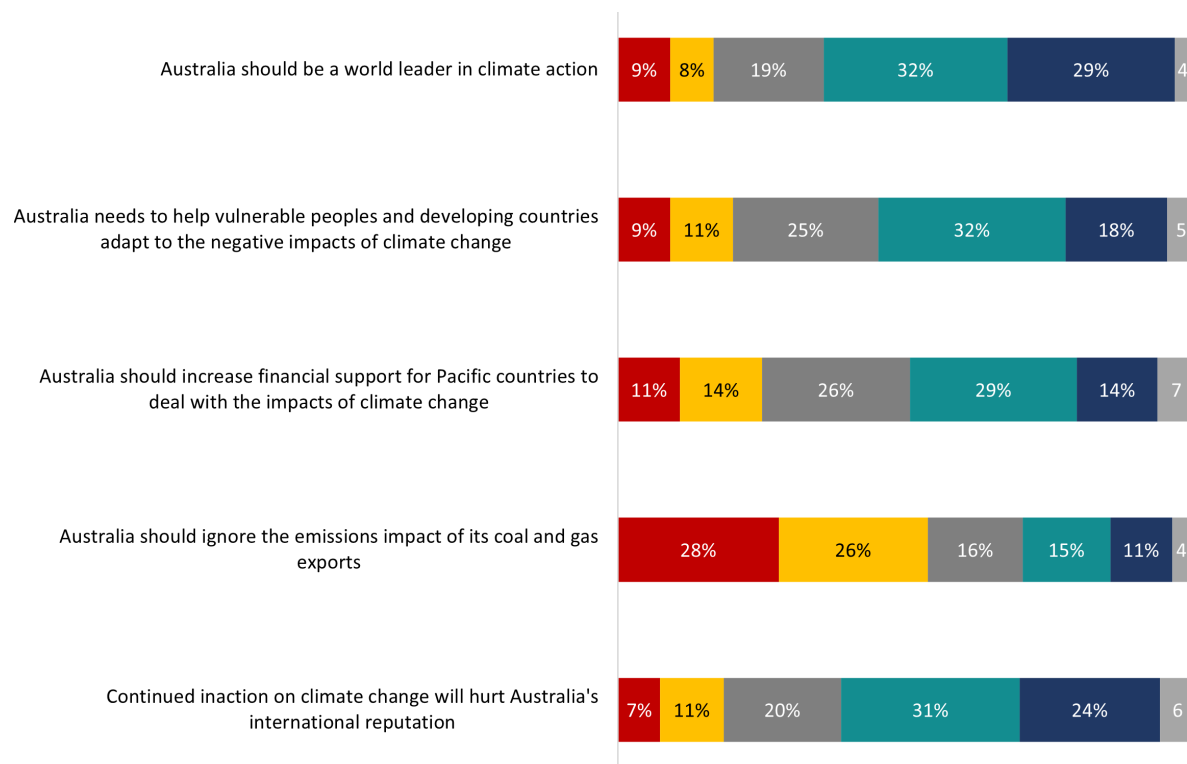


FIGURE 4.1

## Perceptions of Australia's International Climate Obligations

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■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neither agree or disagree ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ Don't know/none





# Mining

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—a working group of the world’s leading climate scientists—released its sixth assessment report in March 2023. The findings, as ever, are unequivocal: “Emissions from existing fossil fuel infrastructure without additional abatement would exceed the remaining carbon budget for 1.5°C”. Put simply, fossil fuels cause climate change, and there can be no new fossil fuels if the world is to achieve the Paris target.

Despite this, in 2023, Australia has over 100 new fossil fuel projects in various stages of federal approval.<sup>32</sup> Approved and proposed coal mines alone would add 12.6 billion tonnes of carbon emissions to the atmosphere.<sup>33</sup> This is entirely misaligned with Australia’s climate commitments.

Much of the rhetoric around the necessity of fossil fuel industries centres around mining as a regional employer and a contributor to Australia’s GDP. But the perceived contributions of these industries are much larger than their actual contributions. Australians believe coal contributes 14% of Australia’s GDP, when in fact it contributes just 3%. Australians believe gas and oil contributes 12% of Australia’s GDP—the real number is 2.5%.

The employment contribution of these industries is even more misunderstood. Australians overestimate the number of coal mining jobs by a factor of 33, and the number of gas and oil mining jobs by a factor of 69.

Even at these overestimated levels, fewer than half of Australians think that gas and coal mining has a strong economic future (47%), or that the economic benefits of coal and gas outweigh the negative impacts of those industries (46%). *Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that most Australians support a moratorium on new gas and coal mines (53%), and that two in three (66%) think governments should plan to transition into other industries.

## Support for stopping new gas and coal mines

When asked about what action the Australian Government should take on gas and coal mines, most respondents (56%) support stopping new gas and coal mines, including 24% who support stopping new gas and coal mines and phasing out existing ones as soon as possible, and 32% who support stopping new gas and coal mines but allowing existing mines to operate until the end of their approvals.

One in four (25%) say they would prefer for new gas and coal mines to be built, but that taxpayer-funded subsidies should end. Fewer than one in 10 Australians (7%) support using taxpayer funds to subsidise new gas and coal mines.

Most Australians (55%) want to see Australia’s coal-fired power stations phased out as soon as possible in favour of a rapid shift to clean energy, even if doing so costs more in the short term.

One in four (25%) would prefer to keep coal-fired power stations running for as long as possible, and to deal with the costs and negative impacts in the future. Fewer still (20%) feel that coal does not need to be replaced by other power sources like wind or solar power.

Across all political affiliations, respondents are more likely to think coal-fired power stations should be phased out immediately than be kept running for as long as possible or never replaced by other power sources. The vast majority (84%) of Greens supporters prefer coal-fired power stations be phased out, compared to 67% of Labor voters, 36% of Coalition supporters, 29% of One Nation voters, and 49% of other voters. Half (51%) of One Nation voters think coal does not need to be replaced by other power sources like wind or solar power.

## Moratorium on new coal mines

When the cessation of coal industry expansion is phrased as “a moratorium on new coal mines”, over half of respondents (53%) express support for such a moratorium. Respondents were informed that this would mean Australia would stop building new coal mines and stop expanding existing ones, but allow existing mines to continue to operate under their current approvals. One in four (25%) oppose a moratorium.

The proportion of Australians supporting a moratorium is similar to previous years (56% in 2022, and 54% in 2021). Support is similar across states, ranging from 50% in South Australia to 58% in Western Australia. Men are slightly more likely to support a moratorium compared to women (56% of men support a moratorium, compared to 50% of women), but are also more likely to oppose (30% of men oppose a moratorium, compared to 21% of women). This reflects the fact that a relatively large proportion of women select “don’t know” (29% of women are unsure, compared to 14% of men).

Support for a moratorium on new coal mines in Australia varies with political affiliation. Three in five Labor voters (63%) and two in three Greens voters (66%) support a moratorium, followed by about half (48%) of Coalition voters.

While no political affiliation expresses majority opposition to a moratorium on new coal mines, 42% of both One Nation and other voters oppose, a larger proportion than who support (39% of One Nation voters, 35% of Other voters).

<sup>32</sup> Campbell, Ogge & Verstegan (2023) *New fossil fuel projects in Australia 2023*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/new-fossil-fuel-projects-in-australia-2023/>

<sup>33</sup> The Australia Institute (2023) *Coal Mine Tracker*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/initiative/coal-mine-tracker/>

FIGURE 5.1

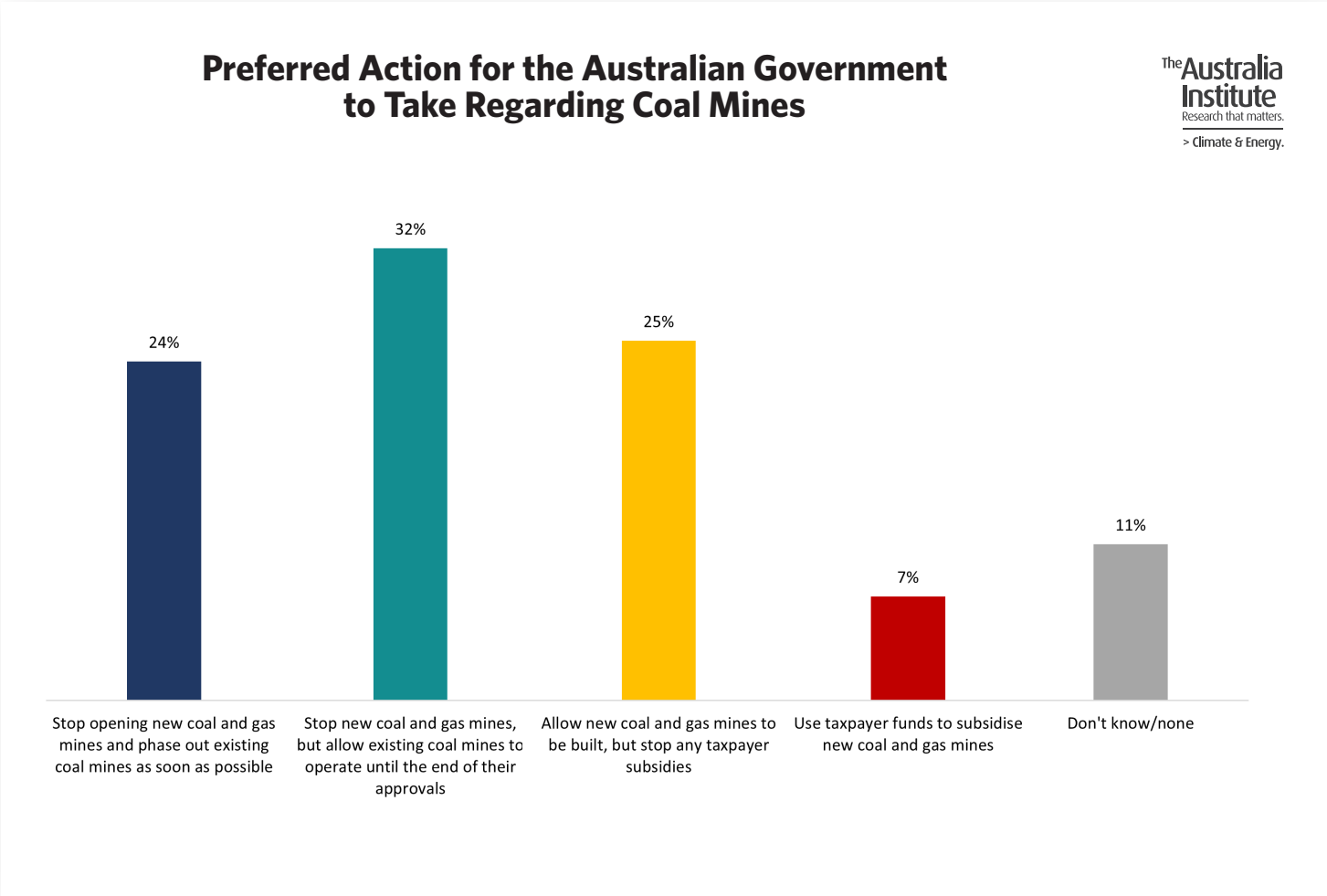
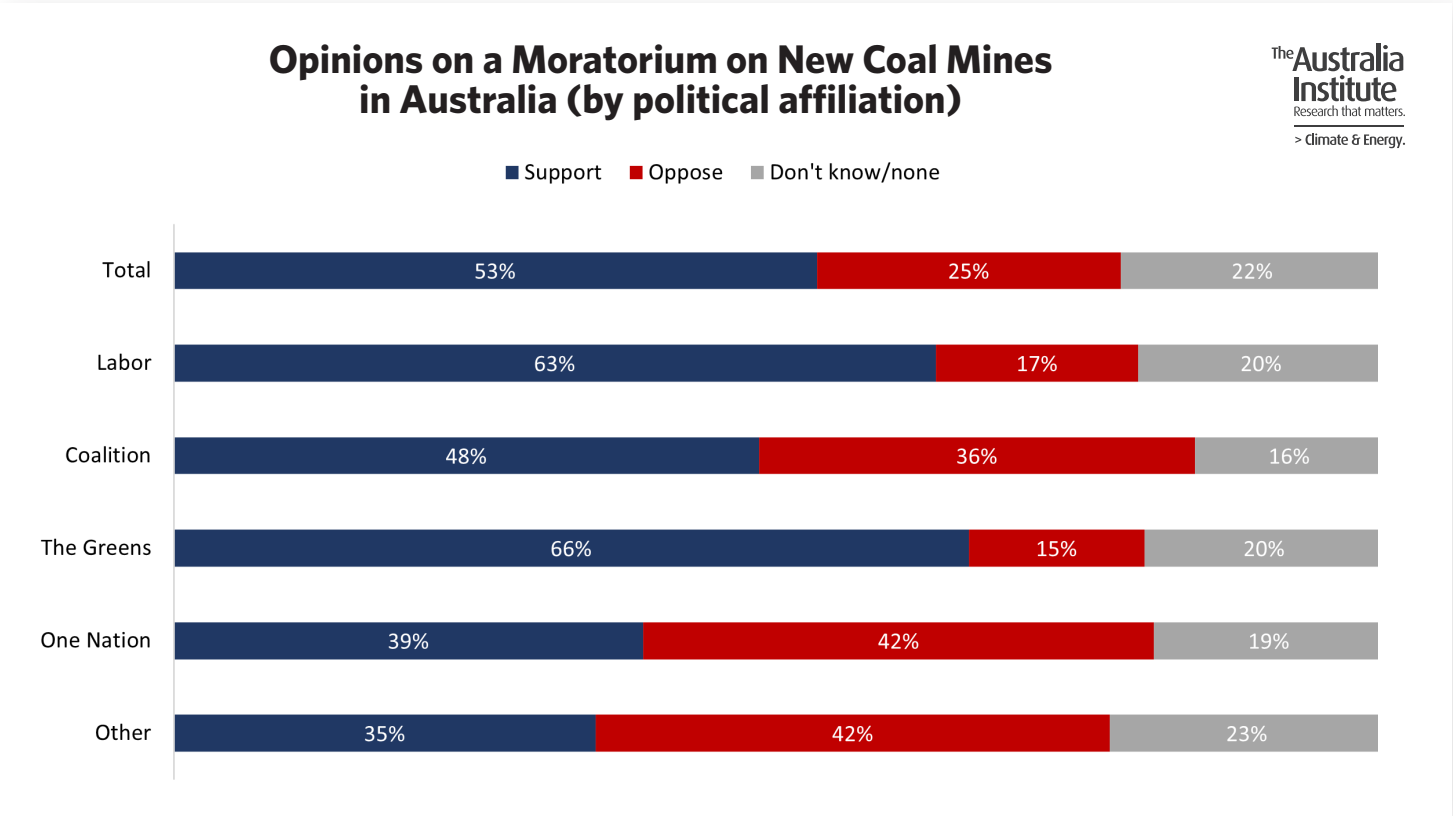


FIGURE 5.2



## Economics of gas and coal mining

Two in three (66%) Australians agree that Australian governments should plan to phase out gas and coal mining and transition into other industries, three times as many as who disagree (23%).

Agreement that Australian governments should phase out gas and coal mining declines with age, with 84% of Australians aged 18-24 agreeing, compared to 54% of Australians aged 65 or older. A majority of Australians from all political affiliations except One Nation voters agree, including 88% of Greens voters, and 75% of Labor voters and 58% of Coalition voters.

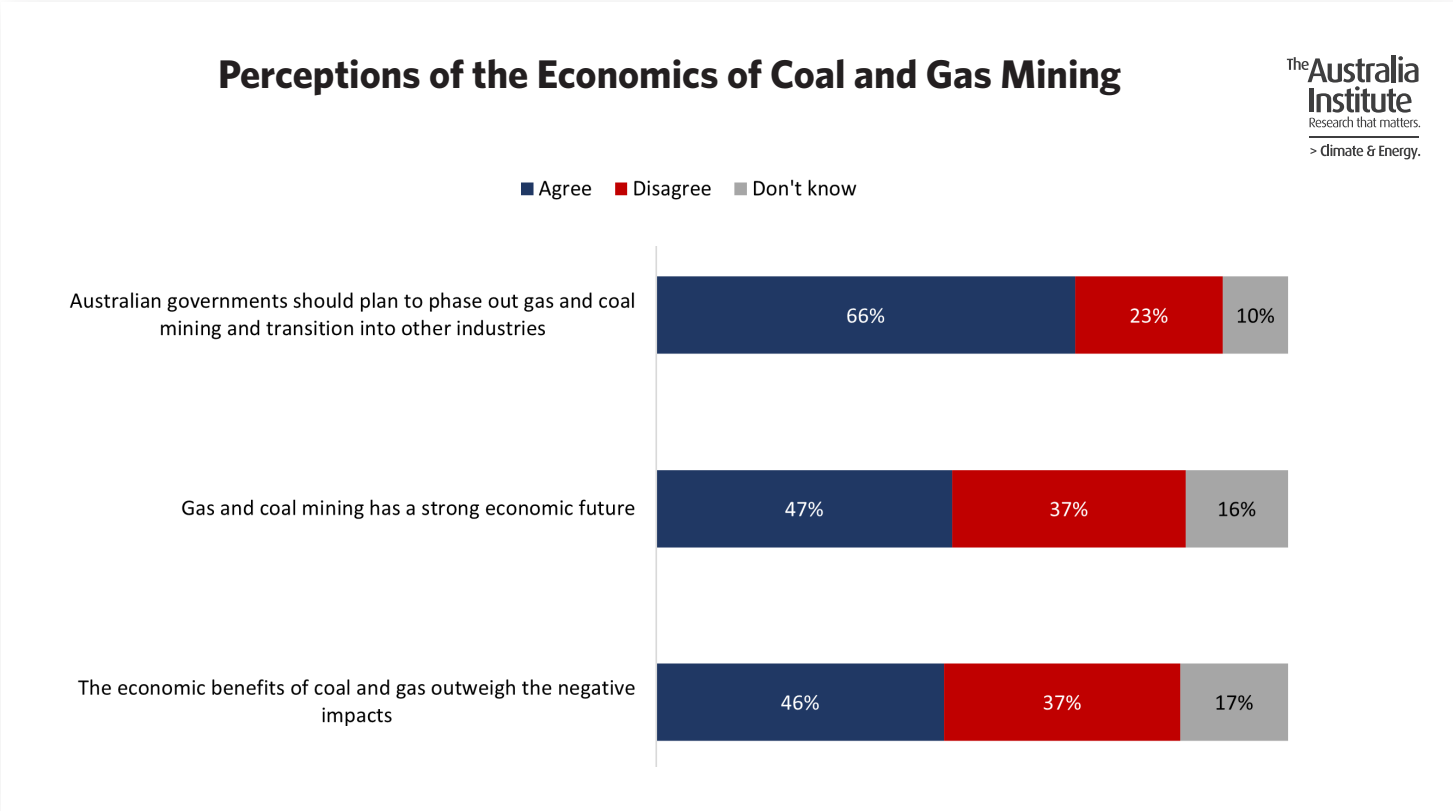
Overall, fewer than half (47%) of Australians agree that gas and coal mining has a strong economic future (37% disagree). However, perception of the economic future of mining varies across the states.

A majority of Australians from NSW (52%) and Queensland (51%)—both states with significant mining industries—feel that gas and coal mining has a strong economic future. On the other hand, a majority of Australians from Tasmania, Northern Territory and ACT (51%) feel that it does not.

Labor voters are divided, with 41% agreeing, and 41% disagreeing that gas and coal mining has a strong economic future. Two in three Coalition voters (65%) agree that Australia has a strong economic future, while three in four Greens voters (72%) disagree.

Fewer than half (46%) of Australians also agree that the economic benefits of gas and coal mining outweigh its negative impacts on health, the environment, and other industries. Just over one in three (37%) disagree with this statement.

FIGURE 5.3





## Many believe new gas and coal is acceptable if emissions are offset

While half (53%) of Australians are confident that they understand carbon offsets, fewer than one in five (17%) are aware that offsets ultimately result in an overall increase of emissions in the atmosphere. In fact, two in three Australians (60%) think that offsets result in either no change or an overall reduction of emissions in the atmosphere.

Despite most Australians thinking that offsets result in no change or reduced emissions, fewer than half (44%) of Australians agree that opening new gas and coal mines is acceptable if some of the carbon emissions are offset (25% disagree, and 23% neither agree nor disagree). While the proportion of Australians who think use of offsets can justify new fossil fuel projects is not a clear majority, the popularity of offsets should be considered in light of general misunderstanding of how they work and may reflect growing sentiment to reduce the emissions impact of existing mines and power stations.

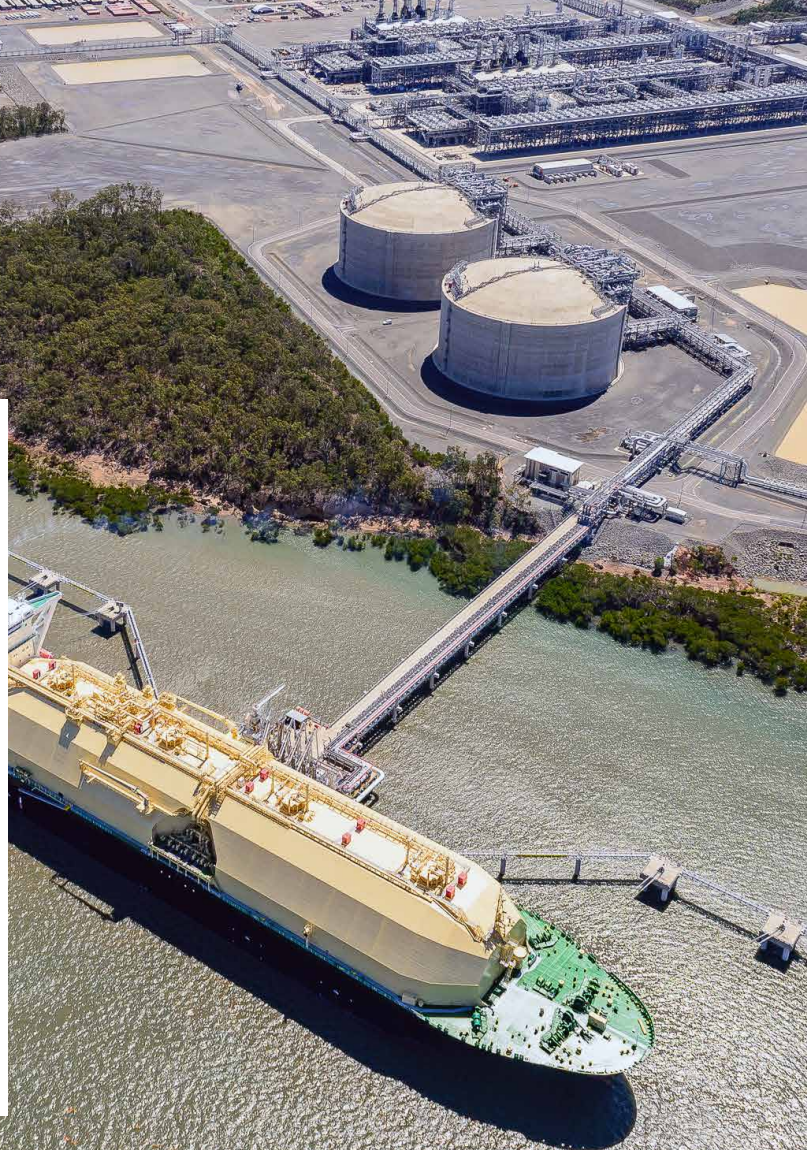
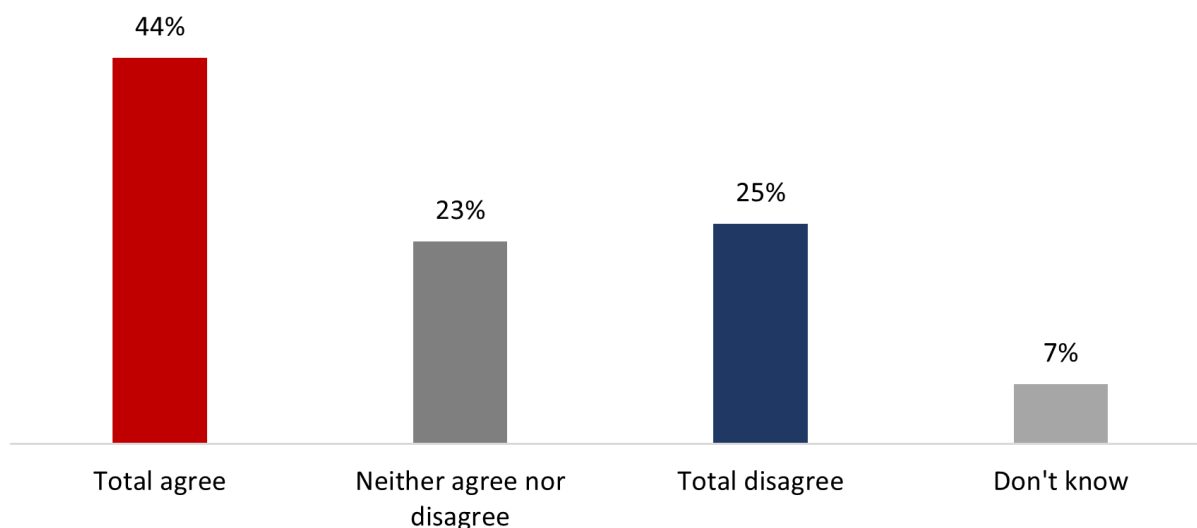


FIGURE 5.4

### Opinion on Whether Opening New Gas and Coal Mines is Acceptable if Some of the Carbon Emissions Are Offset

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## Australians overestimate the size and economic value of the coal industry

*Climate of the Nation 2023* explores Australians' perceptions of coal industry employment and contribution to gross domestic product (GDP).

As in previous years, results show there is a large gap between the public perception of the coal industry's contributions to employment and GDP, and the actual level of these contributions.

Australians overestimate the size of coal mining employment by a factor of 33. Excluding the 39% who answered "don't know" when asked to estimate these figures, respondents believed on average that the coal mining industry makes up 11% of Australia's total workforce.

29% of Australians believed that coal mining employs at least one in ten Australian workers. In reality, coal mining employs around 46,500 workers—just 0.3% of the 13.5 million people employed in Australia.<sup>34</sup>

Australians also dramatically overestimate the economic value of the coal mining industry in terms of contribution to GDP. Excluding the 42% of respondents who selected "don't know", respondents believed on average that the coal industry accounts for 14% of GDP. The actual figure is around 2.6%.<sup>35</sup>

FIGURE 5.5

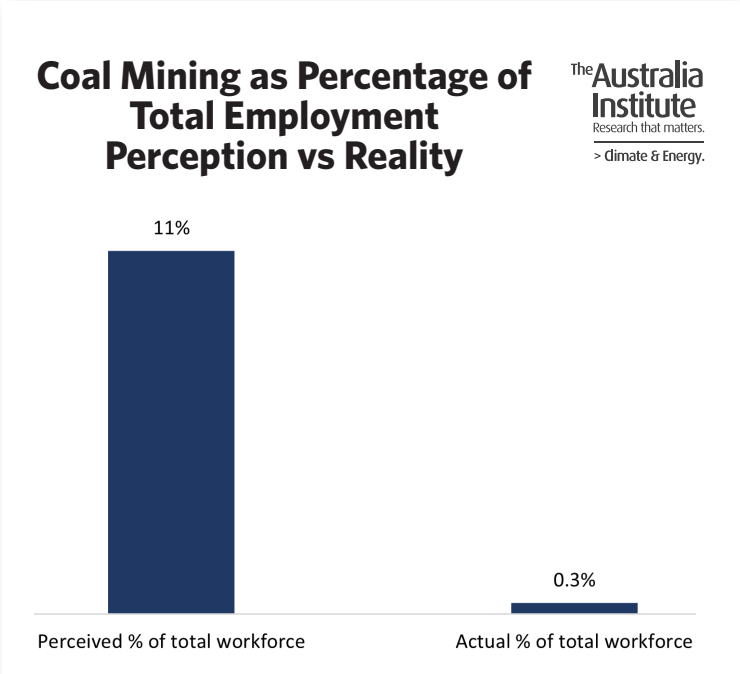
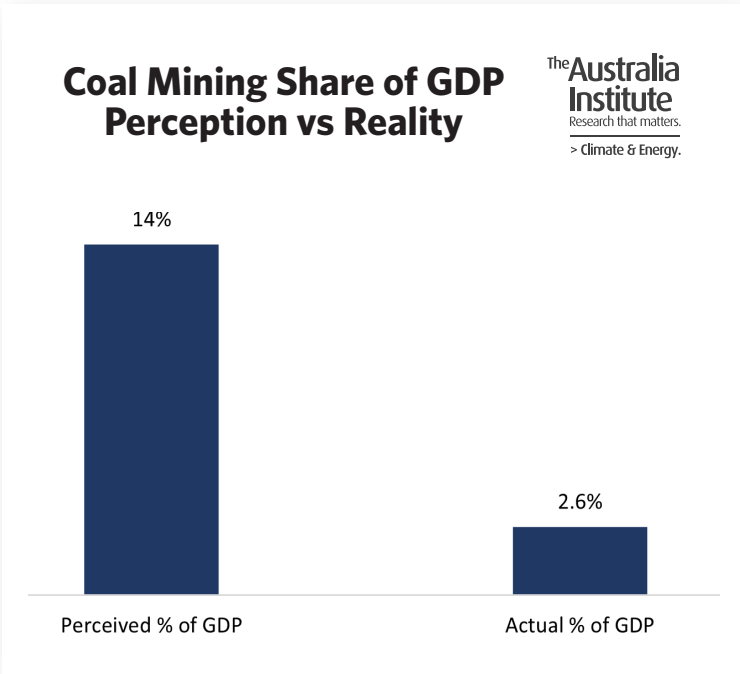


FIGURE 5.6



<sup>34</sup> Average figure for coal mining employment for year to May 2023 in ABS (June 2023) *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly*, Table 06

<sup>35</sup> Average figure for coal mining contribution to GDP in May 2023 in ABS (June 2023) *Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product*, Table 37

FIGURE 5.7

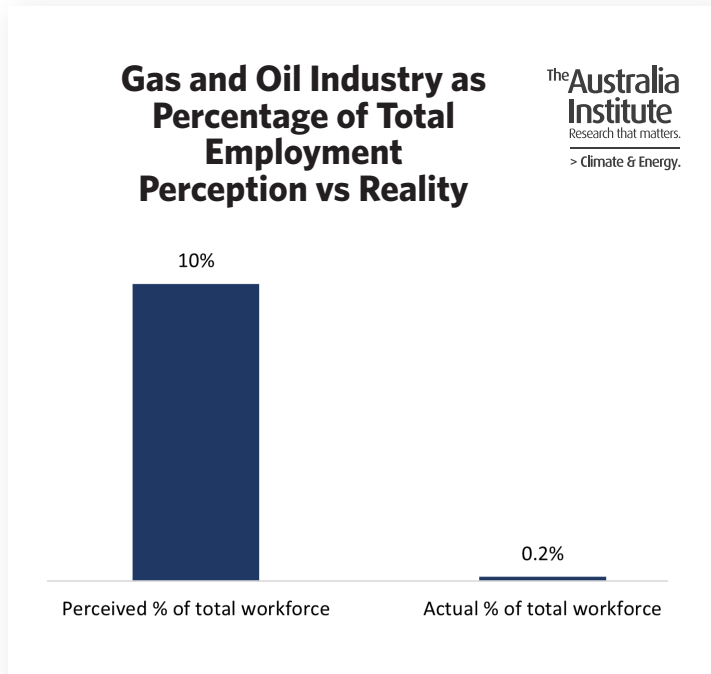
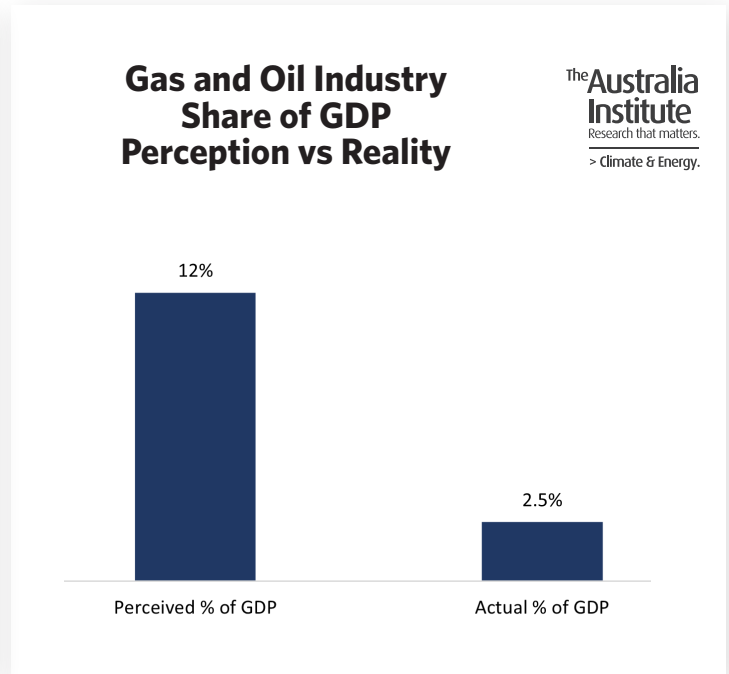


FIGURE 5.8



## Australians overestimate the size and economic value of the gas industry

Respondents also overestimate the size and economic importance of the oil and gas industry. On average, respondents think the oil and gas industry employs 10.4% of the Australian workforce (again excluding those who selected “don’t know”, which in this case was 40%). In fact, gas and oil extraction employs around 21,200 workers – 0.15% of the 14 million people employed in Australia.<sup>36</sup> This is an overestimation by a factor of 69.

The share of GDP attributable to oil and gas extraction is also significantly overestimated by Australians. On average, respondents think the oil and gas industry contributes 12% to Australia’s GDP (excluding the 43% who chose “don’t know”). In reality, oil and gas extraction accounts for just 2.5% of Australia’s GDP.<sup>37</sup>

Australian offshore oil and gas is publicly owned by the Commonwealth and is subject to the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax (PRRT). The PRRT is meant to be levied at 40% of the taxable profits derived from oil and gas projects, but has been heavily criticised for failing to collect revenue, and for lacking transparency and oversight.<sup>38</sup>

*Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that, as in other years, there is a considerable gap between the public perception of the amount of revenue collected through the PRRT— described to respondents as “the main way the Commonwealth government collects revenue from oil and gas exploration and mining”— and the actual amount collected. Some 43% of respondents answered “don’t know” when asked to estimate PRRT revenue; on average, the remaining 57% believed that the PRRT contributed 12% to the federal budget for the financial year 2022–23.

In reality, the PRRT contributed only 0.4% to the federal budget. In other words, respondents perceive the oil and gas industry as contributing around 30 times more to Australian Government revenue than it actually does.

<sup>36</sup> Average figure for coal mining employment for year to May 2023 in ABS (June 2023) *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly*, Table 06

<sup>37</sup> Average figure for coal mining contribution to GDP in May 2023 in ABS (June 2023) *Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product*, Table 37

<sup>38</sup> Carter & Campbell (2022) *Gas-fired robbery*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/report/gas-fired-robbery/>

# Electricity transition

Eye-watering power bills have been central to the cost-of-living crisis, and current expectations are that the cost of electricity will continue to rise: the Australian Energy Regulator has forecast price increases of between 20%–25% for residents and 15%–30% for small businesses from July 2023.<sup>39</sup>

The high cost of electricity is largely due to a combination of two factors: opportunistic corporate profiteering following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and an uncoordinated electricity transition.

*Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that Australians prefer the cheapest energy sources: solar, wind and hydro.<sup>40</sup> According to the CSIRO, wind will cost half as much as gas with CCS (\$1500/kW compared to \$3000/kW) by 2050, and solar will be about a third the cost of wind (\$550/kW). Battery storage, ranked fourth in *Climate of the Nation 2023*'s list of Australians' preferred energy sources, will also become significantly cheaper.<sup>41</sup>

The cheapest energy sources also boast the lowest emissions. While power generation continues to be Australia's largest source of emissions, contributing a third of Australia's emissions output,<sup>42</sup> research shows that the tide is beginning to turn: transport fuel is likely to take over as Australia's leading source of emissions within the next two years.<sup>43</sup>

In the year to February 2023, renewable energy accounted for 30% of the National Electricity Market, and 68% of the energy in the South Australian grid.<sup>44</sup> Tasmania has had 100% renewable energy since 2020.<sup>45</sup>

Although Australian Governments have not demonstrated that they are ready to move past fossil fuels, they have begun to boost investment in renewable energy. In the 2022 October Budget, the Federal Government allocated an additional \$12 billion to the Rewiring the Nation fund for investment in the electricity grid, including for battery projects, renewable energy zones and offshore wind projects.<sup>46</sup>

In the 2023 Budget, the Government provided \$1.3 billion from the Clean Energy Finance Corporation for the Household Energy Upgrade Fund, to improve household energy efficiency and ease the burden of high electricity bills.

In May 2023, with the goal of improving the reliability and affordability of energy supply for Australians, Australia's Energy Ministers incorporated emissions reduction targets into the National Electricity Objective, the National Gas Objective, and the National Energy Retail Objective.<sup>47</sup>

Late last year, the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) released the Engineering Roadmap to 100% Renewables.<sup>48</sup> In a speech during Australian Energy Week in May 2023, CEO Daniel Westerman announced AEMO's goal to have the grid capable of handling 100% renewable energy by 2025.<sup>49</sup>

With a grid that can handle 100% renewable energy, the dual priorities of emissions reduction and addressing cost-of-living pressures, and the weight of public support expressed in *Climate of the Nation 2023*, there is no reason Australia should not become a global renewable superpower.

<sup>39</sup> AER (2023) AER releases final determination for 2023-24 Default Market Offer, <https://www.aer.gov.au/news-release/aer-releases-final-determination-for-2023%E2%80%9324-default-market-offer>

<sup>40</sup> CSIRO (2021) CSIRO report confirms renewables still cheapest new-build power in Australia, <https://www.csiro.au/en/news/News-releases/2021/CSIRO-report-confirms-renewables-still-cheapest-new-build-power-in-Australia>

<sup>41</sup> CSIRO (2022) GenCost 2021-22, <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/technology-space/energy/energy-data-modelling/gencost-2021-22>

<sup>42</sup> CSIRO (2021) What are the sources of Australia's greenhouse gases?, <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/environmental-impacts/climate-change/climate-change-qa/sources-of-ghg-gases>

<sup>43</sup> Australian National University, Institute for Climate, Energy & Disaster Solutions (2023) Australian Energy Emissions Monitor March 2023, <https://iced.s.anu.edu.au/australian-energy-emissions-monitor-march-2023>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Jeremy Rockliff, Premier of Tasmania (2020) Tasmania surges to 100% renewable energy, [https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/site\\_resources\\_2015/additional\\_releases/tasmania\\_surges\\_to\\_100\\_renewable\\_energy](https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/site_resources_2015/additional_releases/tasmania_surges_to_100_renewable_energy)

<sup>46</sup> Australian Government (2023) Building a clean energy future, The Australian Government's plan to become a renewable energy superpower, [https://budget.gov.au/content/factsheets/download/factsheet\\_clean\\_energy-20230510.pdf](https://budget.gov.au/content/factsheets/download/factsheet_clean_energy-20230510.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (2023) Incorporating an emissions reduction objective into the national energy objectives, <https://www.energy.gov.au/government-priorities/energy-and-climate-change-ministerial-council/working-groups/national-energy-transformation-partnership/incorporating-emissions-reduction-objective-national-energy-objectives>

<sup>48</sup> AEMO (2022) Engineering Roadmap to 100% Renewables, <https://aemo.com.au/en/initiatives/major-programs/engineering-framework>

<sup>49</sup> Westerman (2023) Daniel Westerman's Australian Energy Week speech: Orchestrating the pace of change so the energy system stays functional through the transition, <https://aemo.com.au/en/newsroom/news-updates/orchestrating-the-pace-of-change>

**TABLE 6.1: PREFERRED ENERGY SOURCES**  
(PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO RANKED EACH ENERGY SOURCE  
IN THEIR TOP THREE PREFERENCES)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Solar</b>	76%	79%	79%	76%	<b>68%</b>
<b>Wind</b>	58%	62%	63%	60%	<b>51%</b>
<b>Hydro</b>	39%	39%	37%	40%	<b>39%</b>
<b>Power Storage</b>	29%	29%	31%	30%	<b>28%</b>
<b>Gas</b>	20%	19%	19%	21%	<b>28%</b>
<b>Nuclear</b>	22%	21%	20%	22%	<b>27%</b>
<b>Coal</b>	18%	14%	15%	17%	<b>23%</b>
<b>Tidal/Wave</b>	21%	22%	20%	21%	<b>19%</b>
<b>Geothermal</b>	17%	16%	16%	14%	<b>17%</b>

## Solar and wind are Australia's favourite energy sources

Solar power is consistently Australia's favourite energy source. *Climate of the Nation 2023* confirms that nothing has changed in this regard: when respondents are asked to rank nine energy sources for Australia from most to least preferred, solar is the most popular.

Solar is selected as the number one choice by 42% of Australians, regardless of age, state and political affiliation—with the exception of One Nation voters, whose favourite energy source is coal (24%), followed by solar (23%). When considering Australians' top three energy sources, two in three choose solar (68%), one in two choose wind energy (51%), and one in three choose hydro (39%).

Energy source preference differs between states. Power storage is most favoured by respondents from South Australian—home of the first big battery, the Hornsdale Power Reserve (40% rank it in their top three, compared to 28% nationally). Wind power is also most favoured by South Australians (66% rank it in their top three, compared to 51% nationally)—unsurprising, perhaps, given that wind generated 44% of the state's electricity in the 2021–22 financial year, the largest proportion of any state in Australia.<sup>50</sup>

Western Australians are most likely to favour solar (81% rank it in their top three, compared to 68% nationally). More than a third of Western Australian homes and businesses have rooftop solar, making it the state's largest source of electricity.

## Coal and gas remain unpopular

At the other end of the spectrum, *Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that while the popularity of gas has increased (28% rank gas in their top three - up from 21% in 2022), gas power remains plan B or C for most Australians.

Despite more than one in four Australians thinking gas is important - potentially a legacy of the previous government's 'gas-fired recovery' plan - only 6% would prefer gas to solar, wind or hydro. Australians' preference for renewables over gas is significant: there is no role for new gas generation in Australia's energy system (AEMO's Integrated System Plan shows that the NEM will need a maximum of 10GW gas-fired generation for peak loads and firming, and there is currently 11GW available).<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, Australia has big plans for gas, including fracking in the Beetaloo Basin, which could create up to 89 million tonnes of emissions per year.<sup>52</sup>

Coal is also unpopular, with 10% ranking it as their most preferred energy source. Only 23% ranked coal in their top three—again, representing an increase from 2022, when the figure was 17%. Despite this, Australia has 28 approved and proposed coal projects, which together could create 12.6 billion tonnes of emissions.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Government of South Australia, Energy & Mining (n.d.) *Leading the green economy*, <https://www.energymining.sa.gov.au/industry/modern-energy/leading-the-green-economy>

<sup>51</sup> Australian Energy Market Operator (2022) *2022 Integrated System Plan*, <https://aemo.com.au/newsroom/media-release/aemo-releases-30-year-electricity-market-roadmap>, p. 11

<sup>52</sup> Reputex (2021) *Analysis of Beetaloo Gas Basin Emissions & Carbon Costs*, [https://www.reputex.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/REPUTEX\\_Analysis-of-Beetaloo-Gas-Basin-Emissions-and-Carbon-Costs\\_Oct21F.pdf](https://www.reputex.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/REPUTEX_Analysis-of-Beetaloo-Gas-Basin-Emissions-and-Carbon-Costs_Oct21F.pdf)

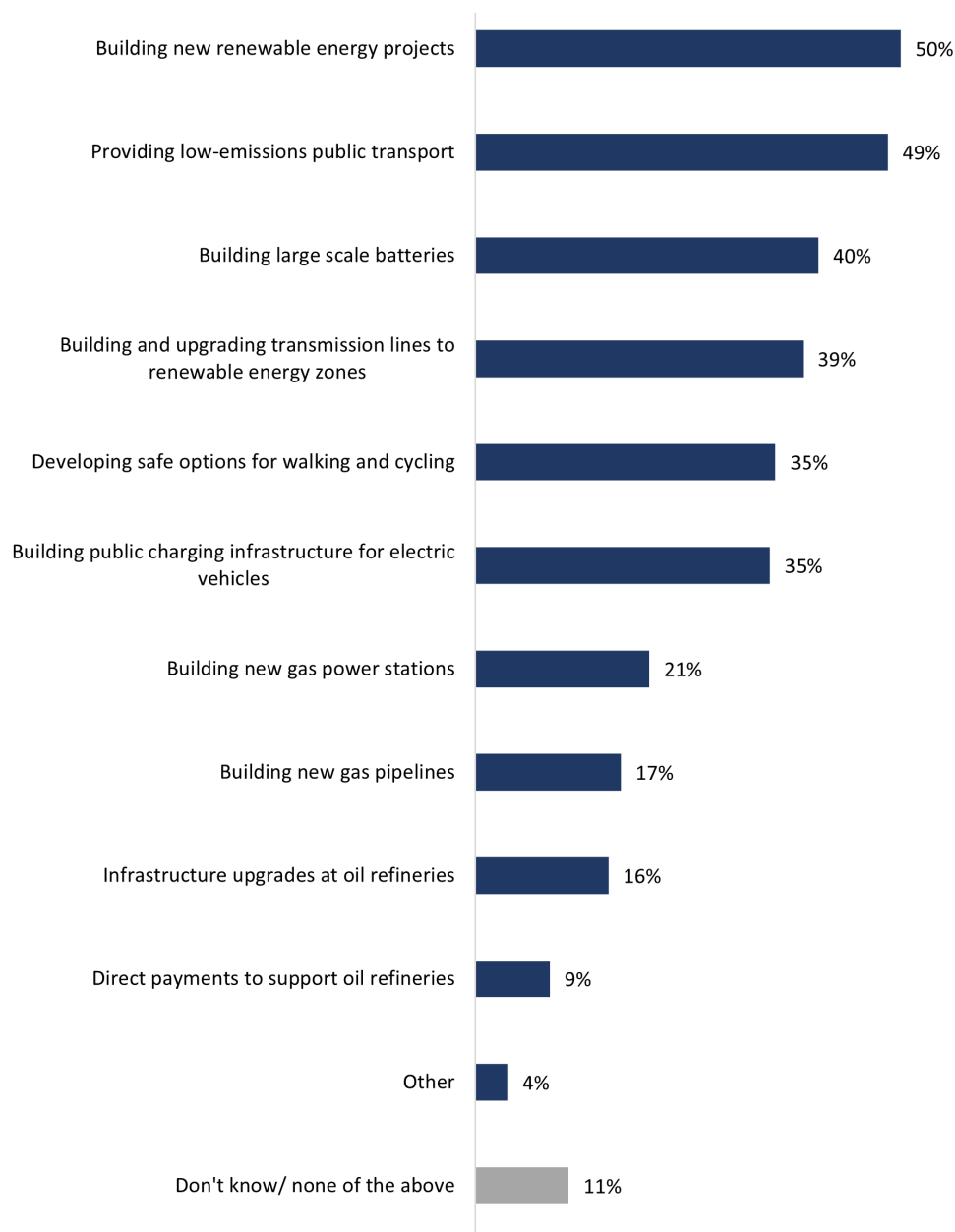
<sup>53</sup> The Australia Institute (2023) *Coal Mine Tracker*, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/initiative/coal-mine-tracker/>



FIGURE 6.1

## Preferred Infrastructure Projects for Government to Prioritise Spending On

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### Renewable energy infrastructure is the priority for Australians

Renewable energy projects top the list of Australians' priorities for government infrastructure spending. Respondents to the *Climate of the Nation 2023* survey were asked to select from a list of 12 infrastructure projects on which they would prefer the Government to prioritise spending. (There was also the option for respondents to specify their own nominations, or to select "don't know/none of the above".)

The responses show that Australia's top three funding priorities are building new renewable energy projects (50%); providing low-emissions public transport like electric buses, trains and light rail (49%); and building large-scale batteries for renewable energy storage (40%). Preference for building new renewable energy projects is highest in Tasmania, Northern Territory and ACT (58%), Western Australia (57%) and South Australia

(57%). Among political affiliations, new renewable energy projects have the most support from the Greens (76%) and Labor voters (57%). Support for low-emissions public transport is highest in Tasmania, Northern Territory and ACT (54%), followed by 50% support each from Victoria, Queensland, and Western Australia.

Australians' lowest preferences for government spending are direct payments to support oil refineries (9%), infrastructure upgrades at oil refineries (16%), building new gas pipelines (17%), and building new gas power stations (21%). Other answers include building and upgrading transmission lines to renewable energy zones, developing safe options for walking and cycling, and building public charging infrastructure for electric vehicles.

## A majority of Australians want coal power phased out within the decade

In April 2023, one of Australia's largest coal-fired power plants, Liddell, closed after half a century in operation. Eraring, Australia's largest power station, will close in 2025, seven years ahead of schedule. The closures of Bayswater and Loy Yang A have also shifted forward to 2033 and 2035.<sup>54 55</sup> The AEMO's ISP expects that coal generation will be completely phased out by 2043. Experts have warned that to keep warming within 1.5°C, wealthy members of the OECD, like Australia, should phase out coal before 2030.<sup>56</sup>

Australians agree. When asked about their preferred timeline for coal-fired power generation closures, one in three Australians (34%) want coal-fired power generation completely ended by 2030, making this the most popular response. One in four (24%) want coal-fired generation ended by 2040, and 12% want it ended by 2050. Concerningly, 30% of Australians say coal-fired power should never be completely phased out.

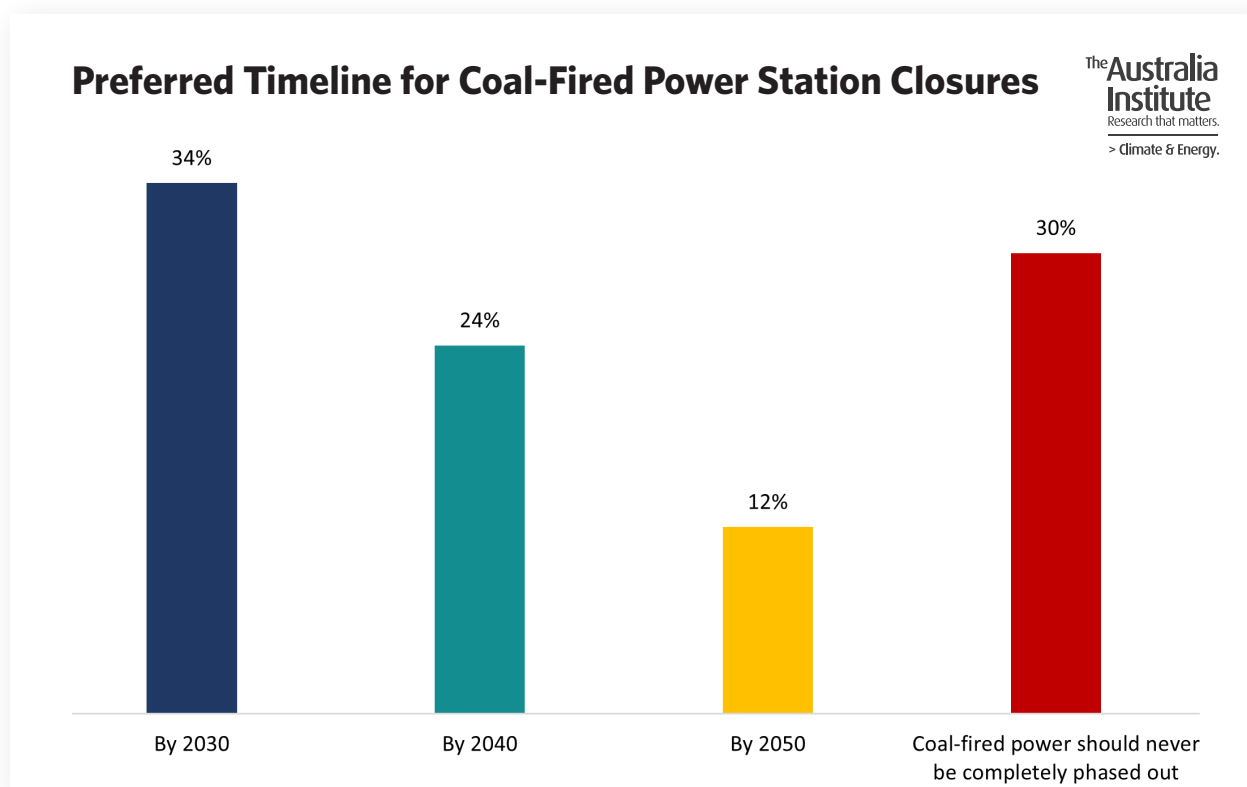
Support for the closure of coal-fired power stations within the next ten years is strongest in states that are currently less reliant on coal-fired power generation for electricity: 44% of South Australians, 42% of those in Tasmania, the NT and the ACT, and 42% of Western Australians all support ending coal-fired power

generation by 2030, compared to 38% of Victorians, 30% of Queenslanders, and 29% of Australians from NSW. More Queenslanders (35%) and Australians from NSW (33%) think coal-fired power should never be completely phased out than any other response.

Australians aged 18-24 want the fastest transition of any age group, with 44% thinking coal-fired power generation should be phased out by 2030 (and 28% by 2040), along with 25% of Australians aged 25-34, 37% of Australians aged 35-49 and 50-64, and 31% of Australians aged 65 and over. In contrast to last year, when a strong gender difference characterised responses to this question—42% of women, compared to only 33% of men, thought coal-fired power should end this decade—in 2023, similar numbers of both women (35%) and men (33%) think that coal-fired power generation should end by 2030.

There is also a significant difference in opinion between different political affiliations on the appropriate timeline for coal closures. Two in three (67%) Greens voters believe coal generation should end by 2030, compared to about half (45%) of Labor voters, 29% of other voters, 16% of Coalition voters and 8% of One Nation voters. Two in three (66%) One Nation voters think that coal-fired power should never be completely phased out, the largest majority of any political affiliation.

FIGURE 6.2



<sup>54</sup> Australian Energy Market Operator (2022) 2022 Integrated System Plan, <https://aemo.com.au/newsroom/media-release/aemo-releases-30-year-electricity-market-roadmap>, p. 29

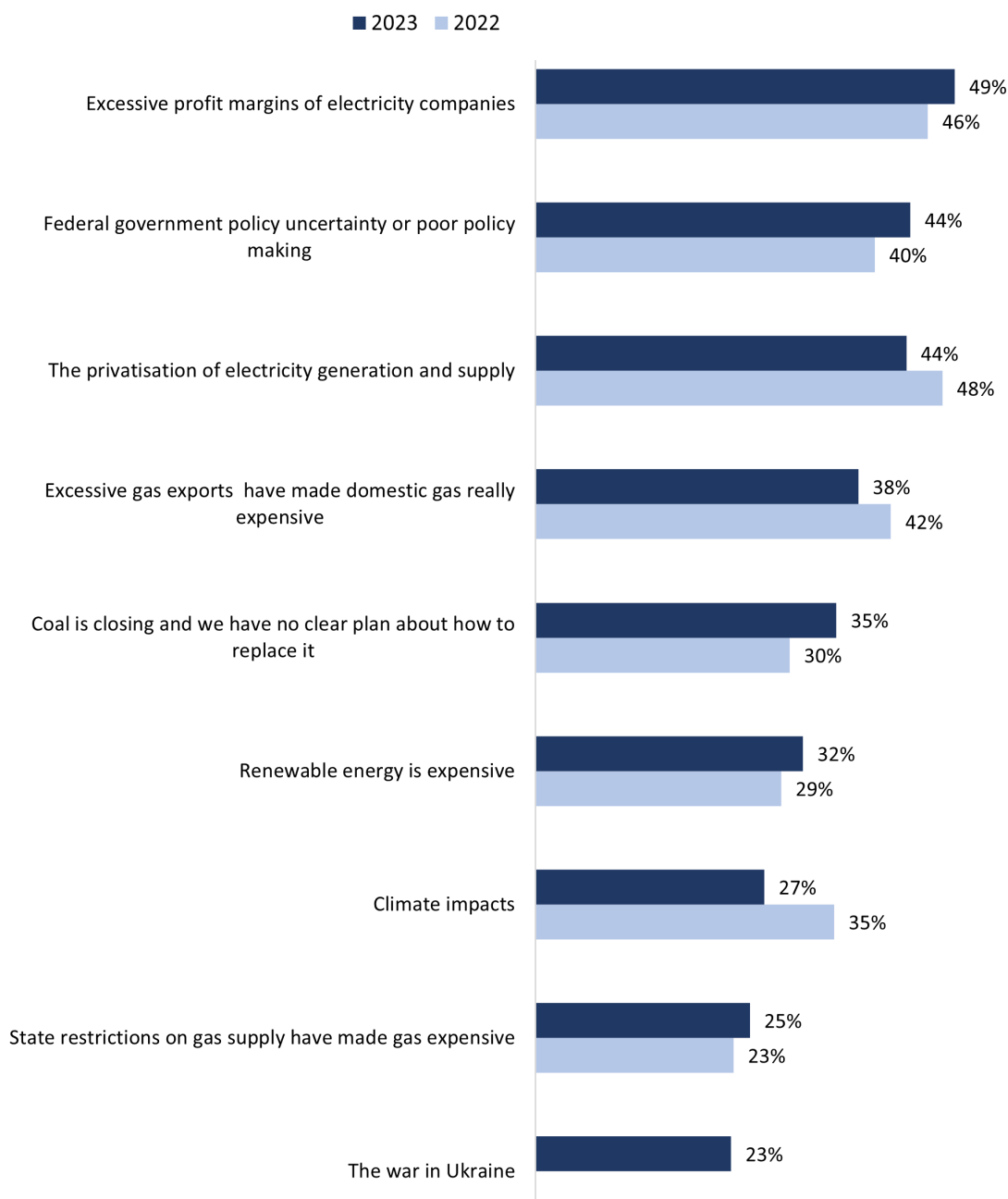
<sup>55</sup> AGL (2022) AGL Loy Yang Power Station, <https://www.agl.com.au/about-agl/how-we-source-energy/loy-yang-power-station>

<sup>56</sup> Climate Analytics (2019) Global and regional coal phase-out requirements of the Paris Agreement: Insights from the IPCC Special Report on 1.5°C, <https://climateanalytics.org/publications/2019/coal-phase-out-insights-from-the-ipcc-special-report-on-15c-and-global-trends-since-2015/>

FIGURE 6.3

## Perceptions of What is to Blame for Electricity Prices

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### Profit margins, Federal Government policy, and privatisation to blame for high electricity prices

The rising cost of electricity and gas and their role in the cost-of-living crisis was a prominent feature of 2023. Respondents were asked to select from a list of potential causes for increasing electricity prices. (A new option, “The war in Ukraine”, was added to this list for 2023.)

Most Australians blame increasing electricity prices on the excessive profit margins for electricity companies (49%), Federal Government policy uncertainty or poor policy making (44%) or the privatisation of electricity generation and supply (44%). Australians are least likely to blame the war in Ukraine (23%), state restrictions on gas supply (25%) or climate impacts such as increased electricity demand or reduced energy production due to extreme weather such as flooding and heatwaves (27%).

Perception of what is to blame for electricity prices varies with age. Younger and older Australians alike blame excessive profit margins for electricity companies, and poor policy-making. Most Australians aged 65 or over also believe that the blame falls on the privatisation of electricity generation and supply (57%)—a process that largely occurred in the 80s, 90s and 00s. They also blame excessive gas exports making domestic gas expensive (57%), and coal generation closing with no clear plan to replace it (53%).

Respondents were asked about the relationship between electricity price increases and preparedness for the transition away from fossil fuels. Two in three Australians (65%) agree that failure by the market to prepare for a transition away from fossil fuels has led to electricity price increases, including 31% who strongly agree. 19% of Australians neither agree nor disagree with this statement, and just 8% disagree.

# Demographic Snapshot

Attitudes to climate change and support for climate action differ between genders, age groups, states, urban and regional residents, and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

## Gender

*Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that concern about climate change is similarly strong irrespective of gender (72% of women and 70% of men are concerned about climate change. However, women are more likely to believe that the Federal Government is “not doing enough” to prepare for and adapt to climate change (51%) compared to men (42%), which may reflect a higher expectation of government action on climate change or a more critical view of government among women.

Results also reveal a gap in understanding between genders. Fewer than half (45%) of women are confident that they know what a carbon offset is, compared to 61% of men. Men were more likely to select the correct definition of “carbon neutral” (46%) and “net zero” (33%) than women (30% and 20% respectively).

In addition, women are more likely than men to respond “don’t know” to questions—a phenomenon that is again consistent with other survey research.<sup>57</sup> For example, while men are more likely to think it is appropriate for the fossil fuel industry to be involved in developing climate policy compared to women (62% compared to 52%), men are also more likely to think it is inappropriate compared to women (30% compared to 25%). This pattern (where men are both more supportive of a proposition than women and also more opposed to it) is common throughout the responses to *Climate of the Nation 2023*.

However, there are several climate policies for which women show higher support compared to men. Women are more likely to disagree that business interests are more important than climate science (61% of women compared to 54% of men). Women are also less likely to think that those affected by climate disasters should primarily pay the costs of responding to them (12% of women compared to 18% of men).

## Age

Attitudes towards climate change differ between age groups. Concern about climate change is higher among younger age cohorts (83% of those aged 18-24, 79% of those aged 25-34 and 77% of those aged 35-49 are concerned) than in older age cohorts (67% of those aged 50-64 and 58% of those aged over 65 are concerned). This is consistent with the patterns seen in previous years.

Three in four Australians (74%) aged 18-24 support a phase-out of coal-fired power stations as soon as possible. Those aged 18-24 generally have a negative view of fossil fuels than their older compatriots. However, they are also more likely to respond “don’t know” to questions about more specific or complex fossil fuel policies—such as a levy on fossil fuel exports, a windfall profits tax, and questions about the economics of coal—than those in older age groups. There is strong support among those aged 18-24 (88%) and 25-34 (84%) for climate impacts to be considered during environmental approvals of fossil fuel projects (compared to 76% nationally), and Australians aged 18-24 are more likely than any other age cohort to believe that fossil fuel producers should pay for climate impacts (61% compared to 45% nationally).

Australians aged 35-49 in 2023 showed a slight decline in concern about climate change (77%, down from 81% in 2022), as did those aged 50-64 (67%, down from 69% in 2022). Those aged over 65 are even less concerned about climate change this year than in previous years (58% compared to 66% in 2022, and 71% nationally).

Older Australians are more likely to agree that members of the independent agencies advising the government on climate policy should not also be employed by companies or organisations that could be affected by their advice, and are less supportive of spending public money on infrastructure to subsidise the expansion of the coal, oil and gas industries (50% of Australians aged 50-64, and 56% of Australians aged 65 or over oppose, compared to 29% of Australians aged 25-34). Nearly three in four (72%) Australians aged 65 or over think that governments should be responsible for checking the carbon neutral and net zero claims of companies, compared to 65% nationally.

<sup>57</sup> Bump (2014) Are women more likely to say ‘I don’t know’ to poll questions? It appears so, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2014/05/16/are-women-more-likely-to-say-i-dont-know-to-poll-questions-it-appears-so/>



## State

Across the states, Australians differ in their perception of the current effects of climate change. Residents from Tasmania, NT and ACT are more likely than residents from other states to think that global warming is already causing serious environmental impacts. Residents from Tasmania, NT, and ACT think that global warming is already causing more droughts and flooding affecting crop production and food supply (56%), more bushfires (55%) and melting of the polar ice caps (54%). Most residents from South Australia think global warming is already causing melting of the polar ice caps (53%) and the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef (53%). Queenslanders are noticing that global warming is already causing more heatwaves and extremely hot days (45%). Victorians are feeling the impacts of more bushfires (42%) and more extreme weather events like floods and cyclones (40%). Residents from NSW are the least likely to think that global warming is already causing impacts, but are noticing more bushfires (37%), and more heatwaves and extremely hot days (38%).

Concern about climate impacts also differs between states, but is highest among residents of WA, who are most concerned about water shortages (82%) and rising sea levels (79%). Western Australians also lead the level of concern in several other categories:

- More droughts and flooding affecting crop production and food supply (84%, followed by residents of Tasmania, Northern Territory and ACT at 82%, and South Australia at 82%);
- More bushfires (84%, followed by Victorians at 82%);
- Animal and plant species becoming extinct (83%, followed by South Australians at 82%);
- Disruptions to supply chains making it hard to buy necessities like food and clothing (83%, followed by 80% of South Australians);
- Energy shortages and blackouts (80%, followed by 79% of South Australians);
- Impacts on health (79% of Western Australians, followed by 78% of South Australians); and
- More expensive insurance premiums (78%, followed by 77% of South Australians).

Western Australian respondents are most likely to believe fossil fuel producers should pay for preparing for, adapting to, and responding to climate impacts (53% in 2023, compared to 51% in 2022, and 45% nationally).

Residents from South Australia are most concerned about the destruction of the Great Barrier Reef (80%), followed by residents from Tasmania, NT and ACT (79%). Residents of Tasmania, the NT and the ACT residents are most concerned that global warming will cause more extreme weather events like floods and cyclones (85%). Both Western Australians and South Australians (both 79%) show the highest level of concern about global warming causing more heatwaves and extremely hot days.

The proportion of NSW residents who think coal closing is to blame for increasing electricity prices has increased from previous years (36% in 2023, 33% in 2022, 24% in 2021), a view likely influenced by the 2022 energy crisis. Residents of NSW are most likely to agree that tackling climate change creates opportunities in regional Australia for new jobs and investment (69% compared to 64% nationally).

A majority of Queenslanders support a moratorium on new coal mines (53%), similar to last year (55%), but are less likely to support other policies to phase-out fossil fuels.

Residents of Tasmania, NT and ACT are most likely to agree that the Environment Minister should be required to consider climate impacts when approving fossil fuel projects (86%).

A majority of residents from all states think that state governments should take a leading role in action on climate change (63-77%).

## Urban and regional

Urban Australians are more concerned about climate change than regional Australians (74% compared to 66%). Regional Australians are also more likely to be unconcerned about climate change than urban Australians (32% compared to 25%).

Urban and regional Australians are similarly concerned about water shortages (77% and 72% respectively). Urban Australians are more concerned about more droughts and flooding affecting crop production and food supply (82%) than regional Australians (76%).

While most urban and regional Australians agree that tackling climate change creates opportunities in regional Australia for new jobs and investment, agreement is higher in the cities (68%) than in the regions (57%). Urban and regional Australians also agree that Australian governments should plan to phase out coal and gas mining and transition into other industries (69% of urban Australians, and 62% of regional Australians). Similar proportions of urban and regional Australians think that the Australian government should stop new coal and gas mines, but allow existing coal mines to operate until the end of their approvals (32% urban Australians, 33% regional Australians).

Regional Australians are less likely to think that gas and coal mining has a strong economic future (44%) than urban Australians (49%), and also less likely to agree that the economic benefits of coal and gas mining outweigh its negative impacts on health, the environment and other industries (40% of regional Australians compared to 48% of urban Australians). Most regional Australians (51%) oppose the government putting public funds into infrastructure to subsidise the expansion of the coal, oil and gas industries (41% of urban Australians oppose).

## Culturally and linguistically diverse

Australians who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) are considerably more concerned about climate change (80%) than non-CALD Australians (66%). CALD Australians are also more concerned about climate-related illness caused by water scarcity or quality, and mosquito-borne illnesses (82%, including 43% who are very concerned).

An overwhelming majority of CALD Australians (85%) think the Environment Minister should be required to consider climate change impacts when approving fossil fuel projects (72% for non-CALD). CALD Australians are more likely than others to think that Australian governments should phase out gas and coal mining and transition into other industries (72% for CALD, 63% for non-CALD).

More than two in three CALD Australians (69%) agree that Australia should be a world leader in climate action, by doing more to reduce carbon emissions (56% for non-CALD). 61% of CALD Australians think Australia needs to help vulnerable peoples and developing countries adapt to the negative impacts of climate change (44% for non-CALD). Most CALD Australians (56%) think Australia should increase financial support for Pacific countries to deal with the impacts of climate change, compared to one in three (36%) non-CALD Australians. More CALD Australians (60%) than non-CALD Australians (52%) think that continued inaction on climate change will hurt Australia's international reputation.

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# Conclusion

2023 has been a tough year for Australians. But despite the challenging personal circumstances of the cost-of-living crisis, Australians remain concerned about climate change. *Climate of the Nation 2023* reveals that Australians know these issues are connected: climate change threatens to worsen cost-of-living pressures, and many Australians are already feeling climate change push up the price of insurance (29%) and disrupt supply chains (22%). An overwhelming majority are concerned about these impacts in the future (both 75%).

Addressing the cost-of-living crisis is a priority for the government. *Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that there is now an opportunity—and impetus—for the government to include climate measures in its cost-of-living solutions. Australians know the Government is not doing enough on climate, and that the Federal Government policy is partly to blame for the high electricity prices that have characterised the cost-of-living crisis.

Australians prefer cheap renewable energy and want the fossil fuel industry to pay more tax, which would create more revenue for the government to spend on the community in a crisis. Fossil fuel companies are enjoying record profits, while Australians are struggling to make ends meet.

While cost-of-living is a visceral pressure for Australian households, Australians' concern about climate change runs deeper. Many Australian communities are still reeling from the impacts of the Black Summer bushfires and the east-coast floods that have characterised climate discourse in Australia over the last five years.

Previous editions of *Climate of the Nation* have shown that sentiment that the government is not doing enough on climate is not unique to 2023. While Australia now has emissions reduction targets enshrined in law, they are not ambitious enough to limit climate change to 1.5°C. Australians know what must be done to address climate change: a phase-out of fossil fuels, no fossil fuel subsidies, and climate change policy with integrity.

Australia's transition to cheap, climate-safe renewables has been slow, and obstructed by the fossil fuel lobby who have greenwashed their way to claims of "net zero" and being "carbon neutral". While the Australian Government makes big claims about offsets and CCS, the true emissions impacts of these technologies are not well understood by Australians. *Climate of the Nation 2023* shows that Australians support the use of offsets and CCS, under the impression that they result in no change or fewer overall emissions. It remains to be seen if these technologies will continue to receive public support as The Australia Institute continues its work to expose the deception of the greenwashed claims about offsets and CCS that serve to cover up the expansion of emissions-intensive industries.

*Climate of the Nation 2023* also shows that Australians are aware of the global implications of Australia's climate policies, and think that Australia should be a better international player. Most Australians think Australia should be a world leader on climate change, that it should be doing more to reduce carbon emissions, and that it should stop ignoring the emissions of its fossil fuel exports.

Even when money is tight, most Australians think the government should do more to help vulnerable people and developing countries adapt to climate impacts, and many think that Australia should increase financial support for Pacific countries to deal with climate change.

Most importantly, *Climate of the Nation 2023* shows support for better climate policies from all demographics, and across political affiliations. Better climate policies are politically safe, and one year after the climate election, this is the time for the Government to walk the talk on the climate ambition that characterised its successful campaign.

As the Government implements policies that address the acute pressure of the cost-of-living crisis, there are strong grounds for incorporating measures that address the overarching climate crisis.





