



MEDIA RELEASE

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Most Australians believe in human-induced climate change but denial and apathy still significant *-confusion remains about climate change causes-*

8 December, 2010: The vast majority of Australians (86%) believe that human activity is either a contributing or main cause of climate change, but more than a third (34%) believe that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated.

When it comes to taking action on climate change, there is a level of an apparent apathy or helplessness in the Australian community. While 60% of Australians agree that it is their responsibility to do something about climate change, just 11% believe that individuals and their families are mainly responsible for action on climate change.

These are among the key findings of the 2010 Ipsos-Eureka Climate Change Report, the fourth in a series of studies, first undertaken in 2006 by the Ipsos-Eureka Sustainable Communities & Environment Unit and updated annually.

This year's study found that concern over climate change remains steady with the previous year, however Australians are still in denial to some extent over the short-term impact of climate change and what they can do about it.

Head of the Ipsos-Eureka Sustainable Communities & Environment Unit, Poppy Wise, said: "Although the belief in climate change among Australians seems to be more prevalent than when the study was first conducted, denial remains over the magnitude of the threat.

"There's some lingering confusion also about just what causes climate change, and only half of all Australians say they understand its causes and likely impacts," she said.

In the latest study, for example, all respondents identified at least one cause of climate change from a list (or mentioned that none of the listed factors caused climate change).

According to the report, this indicates that Australians feel better informed, but with just 49% agreeing that they understand the causes and impacts of climate change, there is a need for increased communication to better inform people.

This confusion is also demonstrated by the prevalence of "red herrings" – for example 25% of Australians nominate litter and 37% the hole in the ozone layer as causes of climate change.



Ms Wise said that Australians believe that climate change has the potential to have a real impact on their day-to-day lives in the future.

Over half (56%) of Australians agree that climate change poses a serious threat to our way of life in the next 25 years, with agreement increasing to 63% when considering the threat over the next 100 years.

“When we contrast this significant level of concern regarding the future impacts of climate change with the proportion of the community who say they are taking action on climate change, it appears there must be a level of apathy or helplessness in the community,” Ms Wise said. “In addition, we see lots of people attribute very small actions to fighting climate change, such as purchasing a green product or recycling.”

And while there is optimism among Australians that their personal action can make a difference, with 45% agreeing, more than half (55%) were either not sure or disagreed.

When it came to specific actions Australians are taking to address climate change, survey respondents were shown a list and asked to select all the activities they were undertaking to minimise greenhouse gas emissions. The most common were recycling (87%), being energy efficient (71%) and taking shorter showers (65%). Only three per cent reported having not done anything.

“This demonstrates that many of these perceived pro-environmental actions have become typical household behaviours or norms and indicates the feasibility and ease of carrying out such actions,” Ms Wise said.

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