



Climate Change Report 2010

This is the fourth report of the annual Ipsos-Eureka Climate Change Report series. Since last year, we have witnessed the disappointing outcome at the UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen and watched the Senate choose to delay the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) here in Australia. Earlier this year, there was publicity over criticisms of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Fourth Assessment report.

So where does that leave us? How does the Australian public feel about climate change now? Is climate change still the key environmental issue for Australians or are environmental problems broader than climate change?

In April, the Labor Government announced the delay of the implementation of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) until the end of the current Kyoto Protocol commitment, and stated that Australia's action would be developed with greater clarity following the action of other major economies including the US, China and India.

The unpopularity of this decision was arguably a contributing factor in Kevin Rudd's ousting and the installation of a new Prime Minister in an election year. Aside from the establishment of a new Multi-Party Climate Change Committee, the apparent public concern around walking away from the CPRS is yet to be reflected in the policy decisions by the new minority Government.

The UN's major climate meeting in Cancun this year has had limited media coverage compared with the excitement and optimism that surrounded Copenhagen. The 2009 Ipsos-Eureka Climate Change Report documented a high perceived importance of the CPRS and a global deal at Copenhagen. The Australian public's pessimism at the time regarding reaching successful outcomes was realised.

Concern

Concern over climate change remains steady with the level detailed in last year's report, yet the level of climate change denial continues to diminish, confirming the acceptance of climate change by the Australian public.

Understanding

Half of Australians believe they understand the causes and likely impacts of climate change. When asked about the specific causes, there is high appreciation of the various factors that contribute to climate change, however, there are still red herrings that persist (such as *litter*).

Belief

The majority believe in human-induced climate change; and doubt about the occurrence of climate change overall has fallen, yet some scepticism still exists.

Action

Recycling is undertaken by the vast majority, and purchasing decisions remain a frequently cited example of action (to minimise greenhouse gas emissions) signalling these choices are perceived as a 'green' behaviour.

Responsibility

Australians think they have a role to play in doing something about climate change, but the Federal Government is identified as having the main responsibility for action on climate change.



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

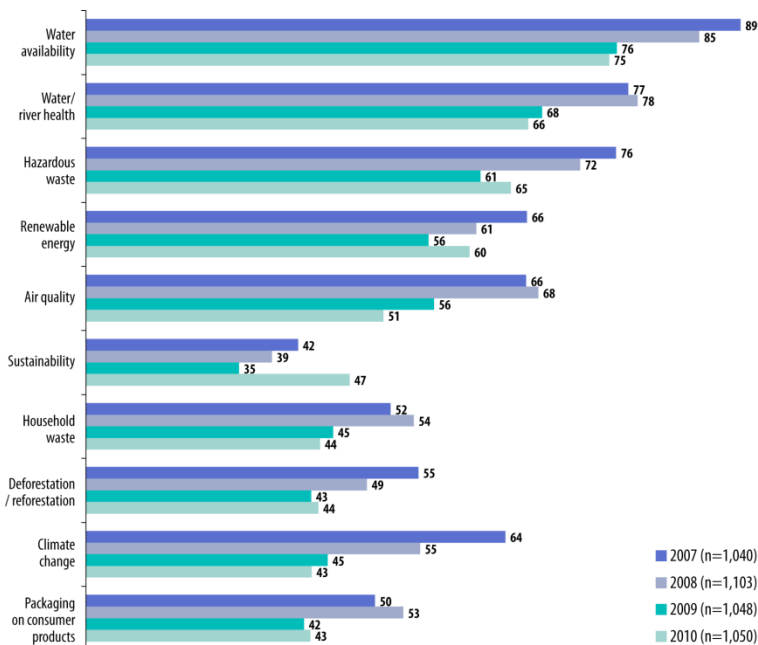
Over half of Australians (56%) agree that climate change poses a serious threat to our way of life in the next 25 years, and agreement increases to 63% when considering the threat over the next 100 years.

When we contrast this significant level of concern regarding the future impacts of climate change with the 43% who would take action on climate change it appears that there must be a level of apathy or helplessness within the community.

CONCERN about climate change

Since Ipsos-Eureka began collecting data for the Climate Change Report in 2007, the proportion of Australians identifying climate change as an issue they would address if they were in charge of the country has declined. However, 2010 remains stable with the 2009 data.

Figure 1: If you were in charge of making decisions for Australia, select the issues that you would address or take action on. (Choose as many as you like).



Base: adults, n=1040 Aug 2007, n=1103 Aug 2008, n=1048 Aug 2009, n=1050 Oct 2010

Water continues to be an area of high concern, once again topping the list of environmental issues on which people would take action on. Water availability (75%), water/river health (66%), and hazardous waste (65%) maintain the top three positions from 2009. Water and river health is of particular concern for those living in South Australia (mentioned by 83% compared to a national average of 66%).

Renewable energy has risen on the agenda for Australians in 2010. It was nominated by 60% as an issue that people would take action on if they were running the country (compared to 56% in 2009, yet was at its highest level in 2007: 66%). Renewable energy was most likely to be mentioned by those living in Western Australia (71%).

Likewise, sustainability has risen in importance since last year (47% identified sustainability compared with 35% in 2009). This indicates a shift in environmental thinking whereby concern regarding specific politicised issues (such as the drought) has evolved to a broader, holistic concern about sustainability in general.

Although climate change has maintained a similar level of importance for Australians since 2009 (43% in 2010 and 45% in 2009), there has been a decline in the proportion of those electing to take action on carbon trading (17% in 2010, 21% in 2009) and carbon sequestration (11% compared to 14% in 2009); perhaps reflecting the Government's reduced commitment in the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.



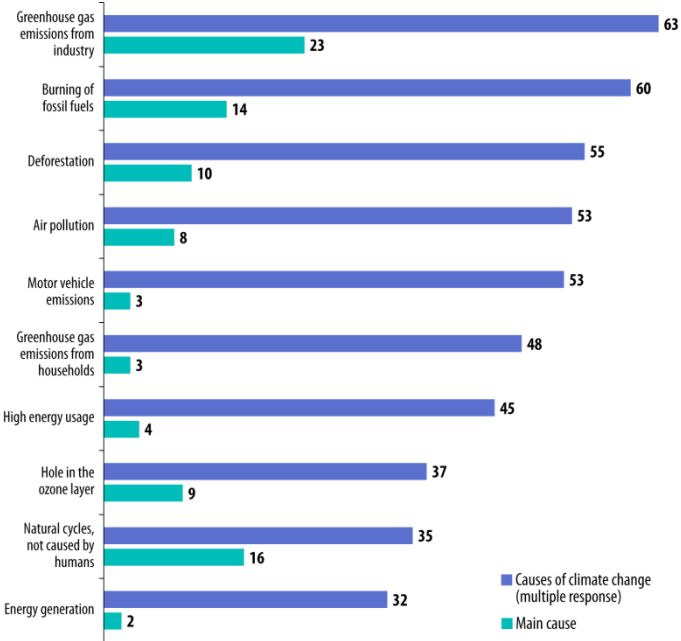
UNDERSTANDING of the causes of climate change

There is still some confusion about exactly what causes climate change. Half of Australians believe they understand the causes and likely impacts of climate change.

The prevalence of some 'red herrings' (for example, *litter* (25%) and *hole in the ozone layer* (37%)) demonstrates that some confusion persists over the causes of climate change.

In this survey, not only did we ask respondents to nominate the causes of climate change, but we also asked them to single out the *main* cause. Greenhouse gas emissions from industry was the most commonly cited cause (23%), followed by the natural cycles (16%) and in third place the burning of fossil fuels (14%).

Figure 2: What would you say are the specific activities or things that cause climate change? (Multiple response) and which would you say is the MAIN cause?



Base: adults, n=1050 Oct 2010

Those respondents living in regional areas were more likely to nominate natural cycles as the main cause of climate change than those living in metro areas (21% and 13% respectively).

This supports other Ipsos-Eureka research and suggests that those living in the rural areas are more aware of seasonal variation over the years (for example, rural Australians have been more exposed to drought) and therefore more likely to nominate natural cycles.

In past research, one-in-ten Australians indicated that they did not know the causes of climate change. However, in 2010, ALL respondents identified at least one cause of climate change from a list (or mentioned that none of the listed factors caused climate change) indicating that Australians feel better informed about what causes climate change. However, when asked whether they believe they understand the causes and likely impacts of climate change, just under half (49%) agreed. This demonstrates the need for increased communications to better inform people about the causes and implications of climate change.

A trend witnessed every year since this climate change report commenced is that the proportion of those identifying 'natural cycles' as one of the causes of climate change is increasing (5% in 2006; 8% in 2007; 11% in 2008; 14% in 2009). In previous years, these increases were small, however in 2010 this result has more than doubled to 35%.

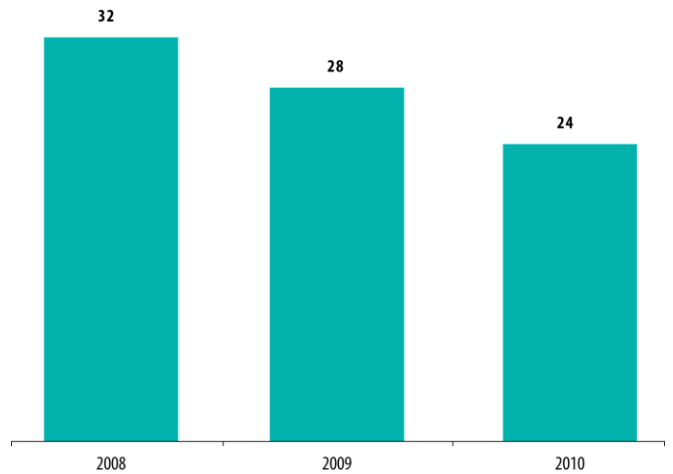


BELIEF in climate change

Although belief in climate change seems to be more prevalent, there is still scepticism over the magnitude of the threat.

For the last three years, we have asked Australians to rate their agreement with the statement *I have serious doubts about whether climate change is occurring*. Since 2008, we have seen the proportion of Australians who agree with this statement steadily decrease every year.

Figure 3: 'I have serious doubts about whether climate change is occurring' (% Strongly or Somewhat agree)



The vast majority (86%) of Australians believe in human-induced climate change (whether that be a contributing factor or the main cause). Over a third (36%) believe climate change is *entirely or mainly* caused by human activity.

Those respondents living in metro areas are significantly more likely than those living in rural areas to ascribe climate change to entirely human causes (13% vs. 6%), suggesting that urban Australians are less likely to witness climatic variance through seasons.

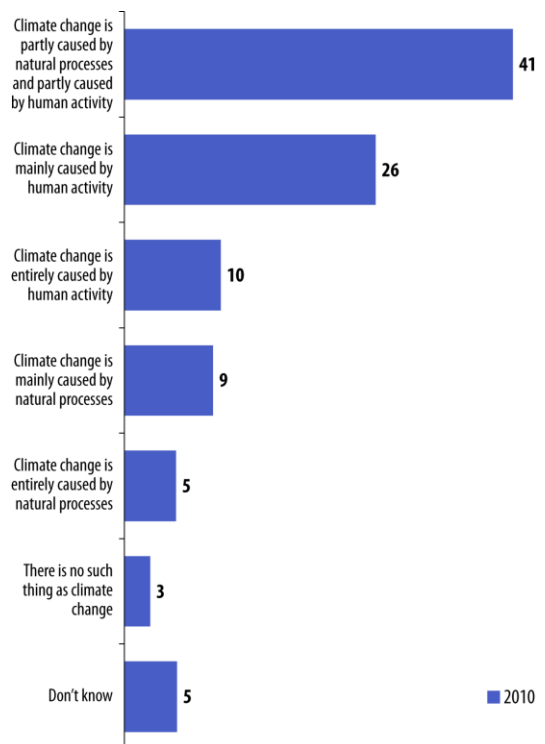
Age is factor in belief of climate change, Australians aged 50 years and over were more likely to say that there is no such thing (5% compared with 1% of those aged under 50).

Although there has been an increase in belief in climate change, over a third (34%) believe that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated. This may well reflect the publicity surrounding the criticisms of IPCC Fourth Assessment report or ClimateGate (the leaking of the University of East Anglia files that exposed shortcomings in some of the IPCC data).

In addition, almost half (49%) believe that the Government is using the notion of climate change as an excuse to raise taxes (although it should be noted that 45% agreed that they would vote favourably to spend taxpayers money to address climate change).

There is broad optimism that humankind will be innovative enough to find solutions for climate change (43% agreed somewhat or strongly).

Figure 4: Which best describes your opinion about the causes of climate change?



The climate change deniers

Overall, eight percent do not believe in human-induced climate change. Those who do not believe in human-induced climate change were more likely to be:

- Victorians (12%)
- Males (11% vs. 5% of females)
- Not completed high school (11%)
- Liberal voters (17%)



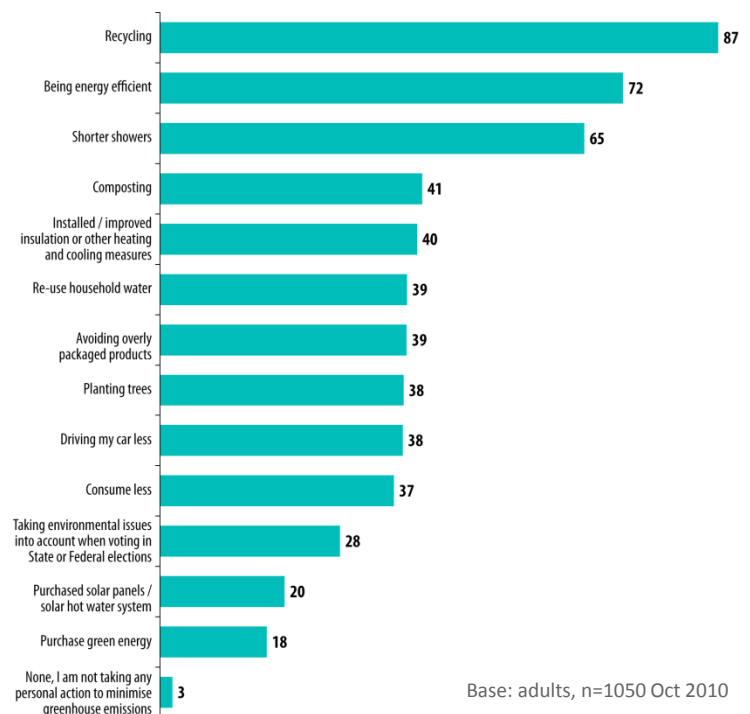
ACTION taken to address climate change

Recycling, energy efficiency, and shorter showers are the most common actions undertaken to minimise greenhouse gas emissions.

Survey respondents were provided a list and asked to select all the activities they were undertaking to minimise their greenhouse gas emissions. Only three percent reported having **not** done any of these (or other) activities in order to minimise greenhouse gas emissions. 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 activities.

The most widespread activity is recycling, 87% of Australians indicated that they recycle. The second most commonly cited behaviour is being energy efficient (71%), followed by taking shorter showers (65%).

Figure 5: Which of the following of these personal actions, if any, are you currently taking to minimise the greenhouse gas emissions you produce? (multiple response)



The average number of actions that respondents reported undertaking is 5.6. Those who agreed (*somewhat* or *strongly*) that they had serious doubts about whether climate change existed reported undertaking a significantly smaller average number of activities to minimise their greenhouse gas emissions compared with those who disagreed (an average of 4.6 and 5.9 activities respectively).

This is unsurprising, yet demonstrates the mainstream nature of many of those minimising greenhouse gas emission activities such as recycling and being energy efficient.

This also supports other research from Ipsos-Eureka that revealed that environmental reasons are rarely the sole motivator to undertaking 'green' behaviours. The social norm proportions of reported activities such as recycling reflects the diverse and complex reasons motivating Australians to undertake 'green' behaviours.

Older Australians on average were undertaking more of the actions to minimise greenhouse emissions (average of 6.2 compared with an average of 5.2 for under 50s). However, many of these activities are related to homeownership (such as insulating a home) and therefore more likely to be undertaken by homeowners.

The actions more likely to be undertaken by those aged under 50 are consuming less (49% vs. 32% of those aged 50 or over) and purchasing green energy (22% vs. 10% of those aged 50 or over).

Collectively, the activities that are expressed through purchasing decisions (such as purchasing green energy and selecting products with less packaging) feature as an important collection of activities. One-in-five (20%) of Australians report having installed solar panels (or a solar hot water) and two-in-five (40%) said they had installed or improved heating or cooling measures.

There is optimism in the community that personal action can make a difference with regards to climate change, 45% agreed that they can personally make a difference (35% were not sure and 20% disagreed). Over a quarter of Australians (28%) say that they take environmental issues into account when voting in state or federal elections.



A common theme in the climate change debate has been the reluctance of Australia to take further action on emission reduction until other large emitting countries committed to reduced targets.

This idea may be supported through the fact that the international community was the second most common response (20%) when asked who should be mainly responsible for action on climate change.

However, this sentiment does not appear to be supported when we questioned Australians on this specifically: half (50%) of Australians did not agree with the statement *I am not prepared to make changes to my lifestyle for the sake of climate change when other countries are not doing enough to tackle the issue* (23% disagreed, 27% were undecided).

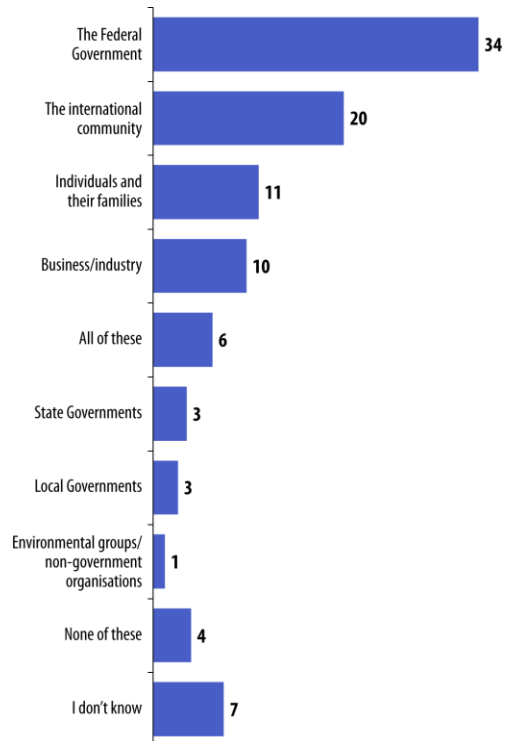
Despite emissions from industry being the most commonly mentioned cause of climate change (63%), only 10% believe that industry should be *mainly* responsible for taking action on climate change. If industrial emissions are considered a major cause of climate change yet the Government is regarded as having most responsibility to take action this suggests a call for regulatory control of industry in terms of greenhouse gas emissions.

Many Australians are looking toward their Government to take action on climate change and this is reflected in the 45% who said they would *vote in favour of a proposal to spend taxpayers money on projects designed to fight climate change* (24% disagreed and 32% were undecided).

RESPONSIBILITY for responding to climate change

Most Australians feel that they personally have a responsibility to contribute towards addressing climate change, but the buck stops with the Federal Government.

Figure 6: Who should be mainly responsible for action on climate change? (single response)



Base: adults, n=1050 Oct 2010

Although three-in-five (60%) agree that it is their responsibility to do something about climate change only 11% of Australians believe that individuals and their families are *mainly* responsible for action on climate change.

The Federal Government was the most common mention with regard to who should be mainly responsible for taking action on climate change (34%).



Methodology Notes

The main findings here are based on climate change tracking research undertaken in August 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and October 2010 and is supported by results of other Ipsos research conducted in relation to sustainable consumption and climate change.

The 2006 sample was conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), while all other years were conducted online. All data collection, CATI and online was conducted across Australia by I-View.

All surveys were conducted with a general population sample and have been weighted to reflect Australian Bureau of Statistics population statistics from Census 2006.

About Us

Ipsos-Eureka's dedicated and highly specialised Sustainable Communities & Environment Unit has accumulated a wealth of research expertise on issues relating to sustainability and climate change.

Our unit consists of highly skilled market and social research consultants, who have expertise and experience in a range of sectors relating to the environment and sustainability. As a team, we aim to make an ongoing, positive contribution to issues relating to environmental sustainability. All team members have a long-standing professional interest in the area, and we regularly commission in-house surveys such as the Climate Change Report to expand our body of knowledge.

The Sustainable Communities & Environment Unit employs a range of innovative methodologies. We understand that studying complex issues relating to environmental and social sustainability requires careful planning and we tailor our methodologies to meet clients' specific needs and the changing nature of this complex area.

We have conducted over 200 studies across Australia covering community attitudes to climate change, evaluating environmental behavioural change campaigns and programs, and have worked in the fields of energy, water usage and management, conservation, land and waste management and many more.

We have worked with key government agencies, utilities, R&D corporations, and leading companies pursuing sustainability values.

A selection of our current and past clients can be found below:



Contact us to find out more:

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