

# A national view on climate change action – values, attitudes and messages

Net Zero Program Excellence - Community of Practice  
Milestone 2: Research Report

Prepared by Generation Yes, ClimateWorks Australia



## Table of contents

Summary .....	3
Introduction .....	4
A values based approach .....	4
Climate change themes and values in Australia .....	6
Action on Climate Change.....	6
The Science Debate.....	6
Net zero by 2050.....	7
Inaction .....	7
A Plan .....	7
The 35 Year Conundrum .....	7
National and Job Security .....	8
Jobs .....	8
Political or Vested Interests .....	8
Nuclear Energy and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS).....	8
Message testing to mobilise key demographics .....	8
Frames and messaging - an evidence based approach .....	9
Conclusions and recommendations.....	14
References .....	15

---

## Summary

---

To inform the development of an effective and active Community of Practice focused on Net Zero engagement this report aims to establish a research base by drawing together leading social and behavioural research. The report introduces values based engagement, which underpins the social research commissioned by the author 'Generation Yes' led by ClimateWorks Australia, and the learnings that can be shared with cities. Messaging and frames that are proposed, derive from national quantitative and qualitative research.

### **Limitations of this report**

Specific fine-grain city-generated social and market research was not available during the preparation of this report. This data and the learnings that can be gleaned will be secured in the lead up to the first Community of Practice face-to face meeting on 28 February 2018 and will form the basis of a second draft of this report. Further, a listening tool read of net zero and climate change narratives in Australia is underway. The inputs to this read were informed by the Cities of Sydney and Melbourne yet will not be available until mid-February 2018.

---

## Introduction

---

Throughout modern history, there has always been a causal relationship between public opinion and policy reform, especially for large, stable opinion changes on salient issues.

In Australia, a protracted and divisive debate on climate change has caused fatigue, confusion and significant doubt in the broader public about how ambitiously we pursue solutions, both in terms of their scale and timeframe.

To ensure governments, businesses and the community are emboldened to institute effective and lasting solutions to climate change, there is a need to address these social challenges.

Specifically, the most significant barriers to engaging people on the issue are understood to be psychological distance (how concrete or abstract your thoughts are on a topic), literacy (which is low across Australian audiences) and efficacy (someone's ability to feel like they can affect change).

The message, messenger and medium are all important ingredients to creating meaningful engagement points. These factors inform the need for a peer-to-peer approach and common, mutually owned 'vehicles' for change.

---

## A values-based approach

---

An effective and long-lasting approach to engaging with and getting individuals and other stakeholders on board with climate change solutions is through fostering and encouraging those values that appeal to our collective and basic compassions. While certain individuals might have preconceived notions of how things are, it is always possible to influence their views if the right approach is used.

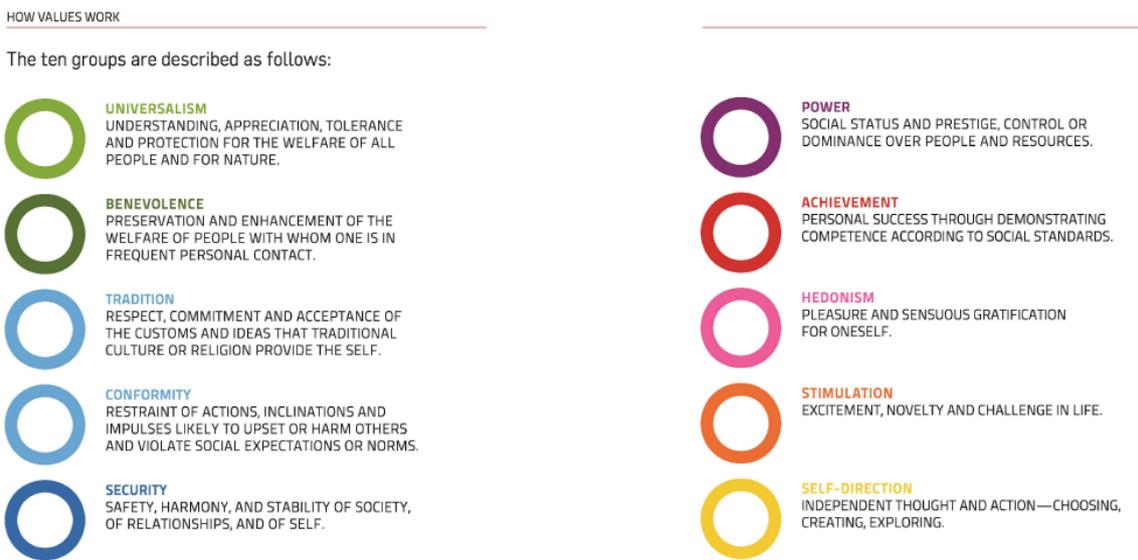
In 2011, the Public Interest Research Centre (PIRC) came up with a group of values that would be useful in engaging different stakeholders on diverse issues. These values are our 'guiding principles' and underpin the day-to-day actions we take. As we undoubtedly know, simply stating the facts of climate change and its issues is inadequate in swaying the opinions of deniers or getting 'on-the-fencers' to take the necessary action to combat those issues. This is why a values-based approach is likely to be more effective.

Generally, the values that are important to us as humans are numerous. The PIRC was able to classify similar universal values, 58 in total, under ten groups namely Universalism, Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity, Security, Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation and Self-direction (Figures 1 and 2). Figure 3 shows how these ten value groups can be further grouped into Self-Enhancement and Openness to Change axes, as opposed to Self-transcendence and Conservation respectively. This diagram, known as the Schwartz's value circumplex, highlights the similarities and differences between the ten values and illustrates how different values are prioritised at different times. These

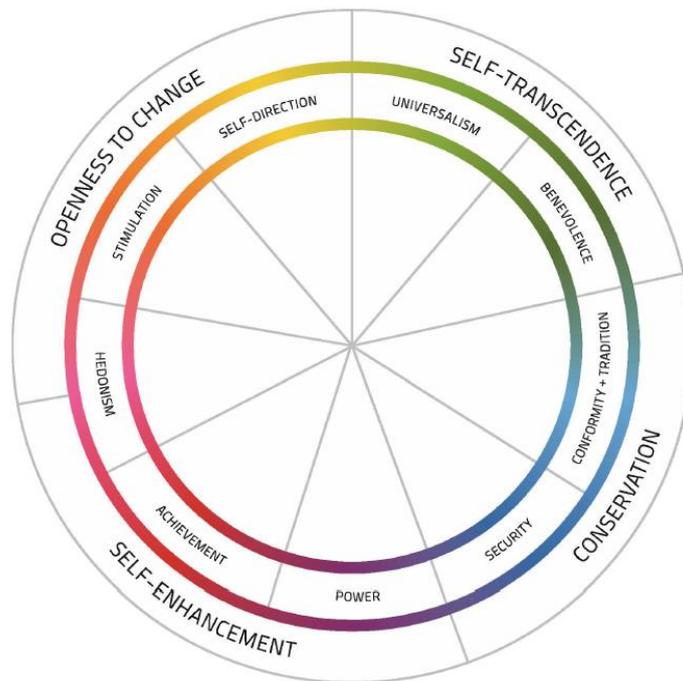
value groups have been identified in ClimateWorks Australia’s (CWA) research around the public’s opinion in achieving net zero emissions by 2050.



**Figure 1:** Grouping of the most prevalent human values. Adapted from *The Common Cause Handbook* (p. 13), by T. Holmes, E. Blackmore, R. Hawkins and T. Wakeford, 2012, United Kingdom: Public Interest Research Centre.



**Figure 2:** Definitions of the value groups. Adapted from *The Common Cause Handbook* (pp. 14 & 15), by T. Holmes, E. Blackmore, R. Hawkins and T. Wakeford, 2012, United Kingdom: Public Interest Research Centre.



**Figure 3:** Schwartz's value circumplex. Adapted from *The Common Cause Handbook* (p. 16), by T. Holmes, E. Blackmore, R. Hawkins and T. Wakeford, 2012, United Kingdom: Public Interest Research Centre.

## Climate change themes and values in Australia

The Generation Yes Program has drawn upon the values framework and the extensive work of Common Cause to understand how values are influencing Australian attitudes on climate solutions. Qualitative research was involved ten focus groups across Australia, framed with a values lense. The following themes emerged:

### Action on Climate Change

Through interactions with focus groups across Australia, there was a clear support for climate change action, although there was a lack of urgency around this action. The groups' responses reflected values of universalism and benevolence as they related issues of climate change and its effects to the future and to their offspring. However, because action on climate change is not yet a social norm, traits of Conformity were evident in group responses.

### The Science Debate

Most of the participants accepted that climate change was happening; the differences arose during discussions about the causes of climate change. There were those who strongly believed that climate change was exacerbated by human activity (the 'base'), while others were unsure of the extent of

human involvement in the issue (the 'persuadable centre'). Nonetheless, all agreed that 'something' needs to be done and were willing to participate in solving the problem. This scenario highlights values of Security, Conformity and Tradition; values that play to our need for 'Conservation'. Playing to these values led some participants to engage Self-Enhancement values. However, the aim was to draw upon Self-transcendence.

### **Net zero by 2050**

The net zero by 2050 goal was largely unknown by participants. A clear plan was presented to the group to show how to achieve the goal. Most but not all of the participants were convinced. Some raised questions regarding the possibility of achieving the target when jet fuels, emissions from cows and the Australian dependence on fossil fuels are still very prevalent.

On the other hand, strong supporters of climate action embraced the plan, viewing it as a clear guideline to take action and a "strong rebuttal of the economic scaremongering they see as characterising the other side of the debate" (CWA, 2016, p. 5). Both groups have clearly portrayed their Self-direction, but the latter group identified a role that they could play as they gained more understanding.

### **Inaction**

Testing the consequences of Inaction with participants aimed to illicit responses to and understanding of the net zero by 2050 goal. Participants did not have words and ideas that described the consequences of inaction. Presenting consequences of inaction on climate change - such as harsher droughts or increases in cyclones and bushfires - and converting them into monetary value or human and health consequences enables a more tangible and logical relation.

This scenario once again played to our values of 'Conservation (i.e. Security) and unlike the climate science discussion, led to expressions of Self-Transcendence (Universality and Benevolence).

### **A Plan**

This part of the research was similar to the 'Net Zero by 2050' section as it drew upon the presence of the 'plan'. A concern of the participants independence of the messenger and the credibility of the plan i.e. it was "based on input from scientists, economists and people who would understand and be impacted by action" (CWA, 2016, p. 7). As a result, the plan was able to engage with participants' values temporarily. The presence of the plan also evoked Stimulation and Self-direction, showing participants' Openness to Change and toward Self Transcendence.

### **The 35 Year Conundrum**

At the time of the research, the goal of net zero emissions for Australia was set to be achieved in thirty-five years. This timeline allowed people to come to terms with the goal's achievability, although a thirty-five yea timeframe also lessened the urgency of the goal.

Where people understand that important actions will be carried over the thirty-five year timeframe thereby enabling the net zero by 2050 goal to be achieved, values of Stimulation and Self-direction can be identified. Otherwise, people express their Power, leaving others in the future to deal with the complications of climate change.

### **National and Job Security**

Participants understood that climate change consequences include changes to the availability of water and global food production. However, these consequences were less understood compared to other consequences of climate change.

Although the issues of national and job securities were not fully understood, values of Universalism were evident among the participants.

### **Jobs**

As the climate change discourse progresses, it is clear that jobs in the fossil fuels industry will become obsolete. When a similar idea was brought up within the groups, participants were quick to note that new industries and jobs would replace obsolete industries and jobs. It was also clear to participants that losing a job in an obsolete industry did not automatically guarantee a new job in the 'replacement' industry.

It is important to note that most of the dialogue around the job market focuses on extrinsic values i.e. values that do not encourage people to act in environmentally benign ways. However, by presenting the opportunity for change, CWA was able to draw on those important intrinsic values that make-up people's Openness to Change.

### **Political or Vested Interests**

As has so far been proven in this research, people are ready to take action to combat climate change. Most participants however understood that politics played a big role in the achievability of the net zero goal. Specifically, they felt "politicians or business with vested interests would block the big action required" (CWA, 2016, p. 9).

This shows people's Self-direction, Stimulation and, to some extent, Security.

### **Nuclear Energy and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)**

Nuclear energy and CCS present alternative pathways to net zero emissions. However, they can be viewed as controversial as the former is intrinsically a significant human and environmental threat, while the latter could be interpreted as sweeping the problem under the carpet.

Nevertheless, this part of the research further tested whether values related to Security would lead to Universalism and was proven, in this context.

---

## **Message testing to mobilise key demographics**

---

Over December 2015, January 2016 and February 2016, Generation Yes conducted a series of online tests of Facebook materials amongst people who were deemed likely to have influence on decision makers and legislators based on their location, age and gender. Specifically, Generation Yes tested women with dependent children and men in trade-related professions in areas of Queensland and

New South Wales likely to be under the political spotlight in 2016. While these audiences were mostly based in areas outside of the major cities, the most popular concept was later tested with city-based audiences.

In summary, the messages used resonated most amongst women with dependent children and the positive message “We Can” was marginally more effective than other themes.

The results indicated an optimistic tone with clear information about what the future could look like, in particular a hopeful future for jobs and our economy. There are clearly regional differences that should also be factored in when developing future concepts and content

It is important to differentiate the role of online campaigns from traditional advertising. Online campaigns do not just inform and educate, over time they also enlist an audience to act and evangelise.

An effective online campaign is unlike a traditional media campaign in that it invites people to take action, to become a participant, not just a passive viewer. For that reason, online campaigns create a pathway from information to action and outcome. The primary audience becomes a vehicle for the message and a critical part of the distribution channel.

---

## Frames and messaging – an evidence-based approach

---

Generation Yes’ research sits alongside a growing body of communications and attitudinal research conducted both within Australia and overseas.

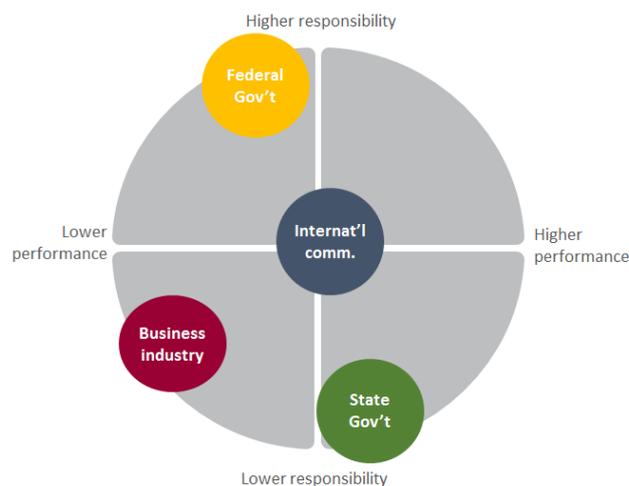
Much of the research discussed here focuses on the beliefs, knowledge and attitudes of individual householders towards climate change, potential solutions and the role and performance of different levels of government.

While this provides critical information about community attitudes, further research on attitudes towards climate change solutions in the business sector, agricultural sector and civil society would provide important information about barriers to action and acceptability of available solutions. There is also limited information on attitudes towards fuel switching (such as electrification) and carbon sequestration.



**Figure 4:** Opinions of Australians on climate change action. Adapted from *Ipsos Climate Change Report 2016* by J. Brook & C. Stuart, 2016. Australia: Ipsos

### Performance on climate change action



**Figure 5:** Opinions of Australians on government and industry responsibility and performance on climate change action. Adapted from *Ipsos Climate Change Report 2016* by J. Brook & C. Stuart, 2016. Australia: Ipsos

Guidelines for messaging described below draw on the values based framework, targeted qualitative research and national quantitative and qualitative research.

Research shows strong and increasing acceptance of climate change as a significant issue in the Australian community, and strong acceptance of human activity as a primary cause. For example, an Essential Media polling in 2017 found 60 percent of respondents agree that 'climate change is happening and is caused by human activity' and only 25 per cent who responded agreed that 'we are just witnessing a normal fluctuation of the earth's climate'.

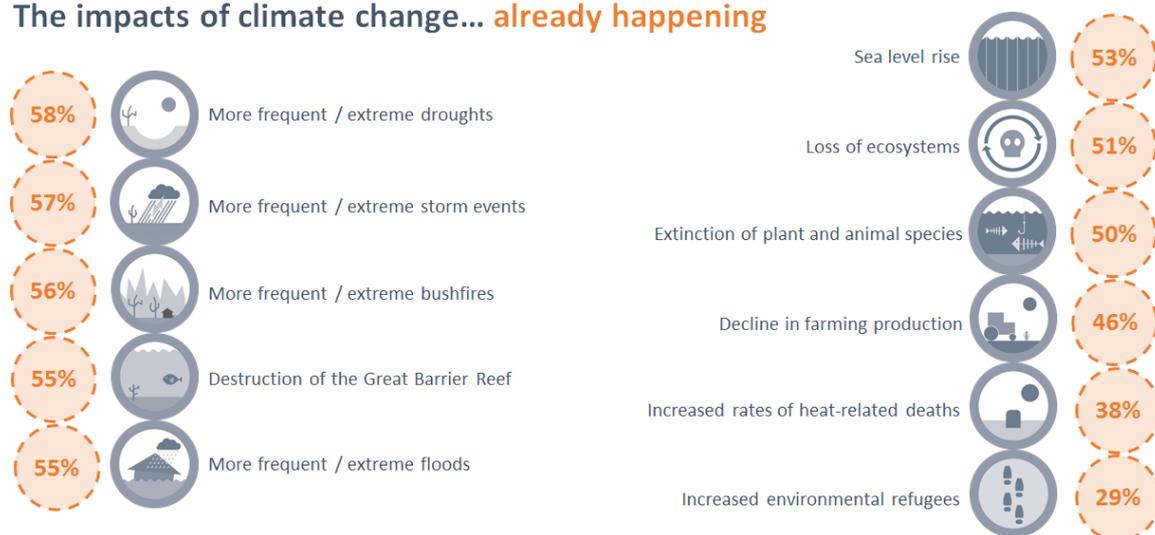
While national polls and research show a steady growth in support for climate action, online testing and tracking through a Generation Yes listening tool found the need to *keep the message positive, beneficial and anchored to the evidence. Reassure with realistic, practical messaging about the presence of a “credible plan”, “pathways to net zero”, “modelling and research that shows we can achieve...”*

The targeted social research described earlier in this report drew upon the urgency of getting to a net zero emissions future. Practitioners could *anchor messages about the future around immediacy -why we need to start today. Take time to explain ‘a zero net emissions future’: It is key to this narrative, but it’s also a new concept to many that will join the vernacular once it becomes familiar.*

The solutions story resonated with more audiences, and it was evident that jargon was a barrier to engagement. Various sources of social research show a strong willingness to act on climate change, and a high level of belief that individual action can make a difference (Sustainability Victoria, 2017). Practical messaging which can channel this self-efficacy and interest in action is likely to be more effective. To strengthen traction *use common sense messaging to talk about action, like “Let’s just get on with it”; “What are we waiting for?” and, “Why waste time talking about problems when we have solutions?”*

Awareness of the current and future impacts of climate change in Australia is also relatively high. One study reported that 63 per cent of respondents felt that Australia is already affected by climate change, while 67 per cent felt that it is a serious threat to our way of life over the next 100 years and **59 per cent over the next 25 years** (Brook and Clark, 2015).

### The impacts of climate change... **already happening**



Source: Perceptions of impacts of climate change. Adapted from *Ipsos Climate Change Report 2016* by J. Brook & C. Stuart, 2016. Australia: Ipsos

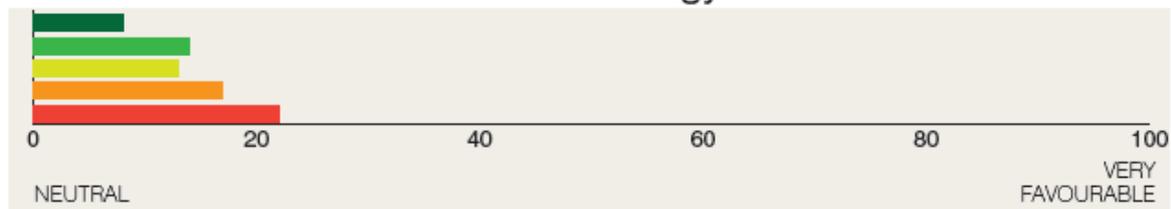
This particular source show is it import to *relate climate change impacts to the tangible: extreme weather events like sustained and harsher droughts, bushfires, cyclones, food security and rising insurance costs.*

While Australians expressed desire to be part of the solution they are looking for more information from trusted sources on the practical action that they can take (Climate Institute, 2017, 39).

Use examples of progress already made and clear benefits, such as the rapid drop in cost of renewable and the rapid increase in reliability are driving faster-than-expected uptake, and the fact that over two million Australian homes now have solar PV panels.

Renewable energy has strong popular appeal, even in sections of the population unconcerned about climate change (Hine).

### Attitude towards clean sources of energy



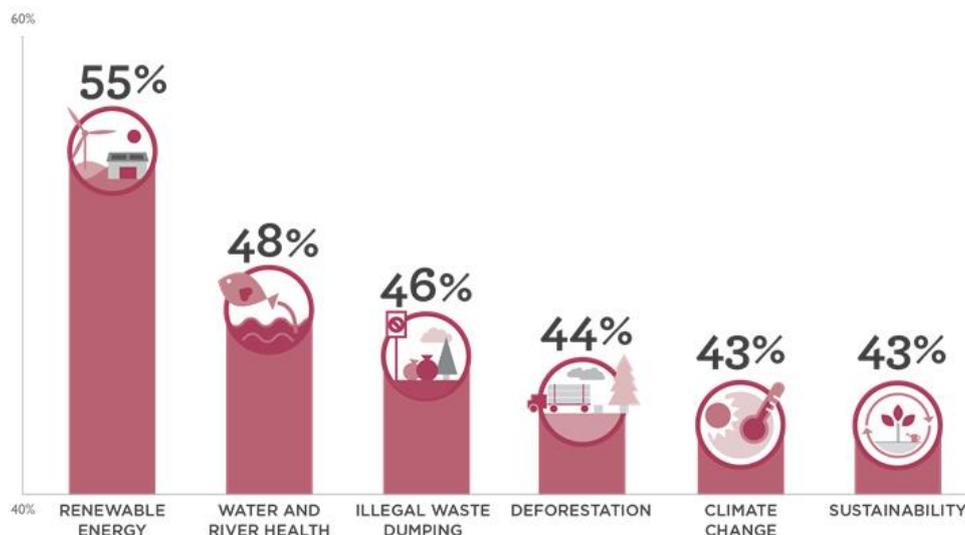
### LEGEND



Source: Renewable energy sources are seen by the Australian community as the solution for our energy future (Douglas, 2017)

Ninety-six percent of Australians want our primary source of energy to come from renewables (58 percent want an energy supply based on renewables supported by storage technologies, 38 per cent prefer renewables supported by fossil fuels) (Climate Institute, 2017, 3).

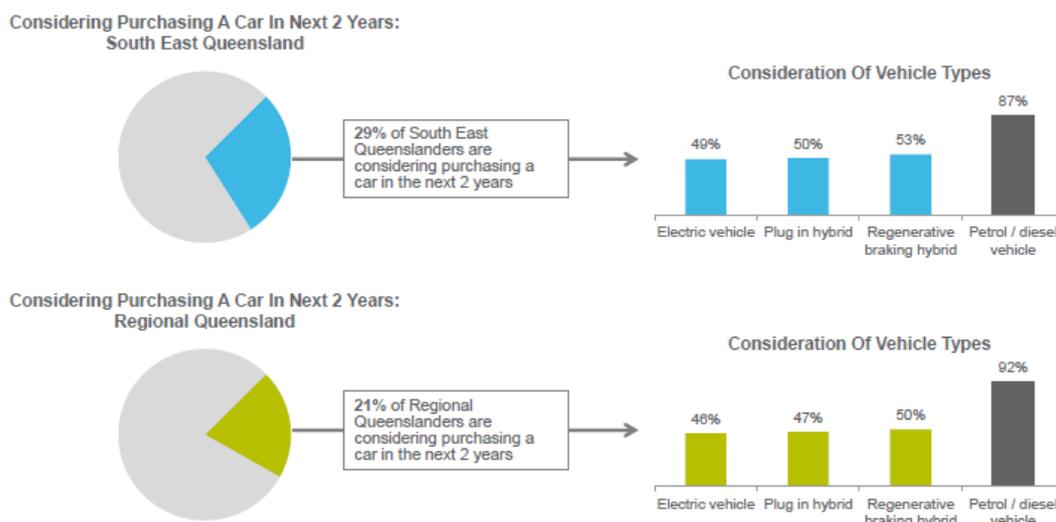
### Top environmental issues for action



Source: Perceptions of impacts of climate change. Adapted from *Ipsos Climate Change Report 2016* by J. Brook & C. Stuart, 2016. Australia: Ipsos

There is also strong community awareness of and interest in new technologies such as battery storage and electric vehicles (Colmar Brunton, 2017).

## Half of all Queenslanders in the market for a new car would be open to considering an electric or hybrid vehicle.



As described earlier, the targeted qualitative research showed that *consideration of the costs of inaction can make the issue more immediate.*

While the above section described some of the most effective messaging based on recent research, the fraught discussion about climate change in Australia and lack of urgent action tells us that there are messages to avoid.

Scepticism and politicisation of the issue continue to impact on community attitudes. In one study, 45 percent of respondents believe “there are too many conflicting opinions for the public to be confident about claims made around climate change” and 28 per cent think that ‘the seriousness of climate change has been exaggerated’ (Brook and Clark, 2015). While these figures appear to be shrinking over time, they represent a strong undercurrent of uncertainty and doubt over the need to act to address climate change.

In the Australian context *don’t enter into scientific debate around causation - it allows confusion and hype to oppose this matter-of-fact approach to positive action. Centre your messages around the fact there is a clear, credible plan and ‘How Australia can get to zero net emissions by 2050.’*

While a clear plan and 2050 goal were discussed with audiences in Australia, it is not advisable to *talk about things too far into the future - without qualifying what needs to happen in the immediate.* Similarly, *don’t make the future somewhere we are going -it’s too nebulous. Make it something we need to build, starting now.*

The lack of urgency on climate change in Australia can be in part attributed to the entrenched narrative of driving up concern based on propositions of ‘future generations’ or ‘our children’s future’. This messaging pitches the issue well into the future and reduces the urgency.

Qualitative research in Australia informs us to keep messages simple, *don’t try and explain the difference between climate and weather. It’s hard for people to really get their heads around and it erodes the urgency argument.*

The politicisation of climate change in the Australian has led to frames to avoid. *Don’t mention frames that have been negatively appropriated historically, like ‘carbon tax’.*

While technology, innovation and jobs resonate for Australian audiences *don’t make it a “do something on climate change” versus “jobs at risk” argument in areas of potential job losses.*

Anxiety about the pace of economic change and impacts on local jobs is at a high (Edelman). Consciously addressing these concerns is likely to be important to build trust. *Australians do understand new industries and jobs will replace others, but pressures can diminish this understanding and revert the conversation to an either/or argument.*

The net zero concept needs further testing in the Australian context. This will require careful explanation of what it means *balancing our greenhouse gas (GHG) output so the amount of GHG humans produce is the same or less than the amount we remove from the atmosphere.*

---

## Conclusions and recommendations

---

A values-based approach to communications and engagement has the potential to shift attitudes in Australia and it is recommended that a frameworks for capital cities trial this approach.

Generation Yes has established that values can be tested through qualitative research yet also through online analysis. A listening tool read, informed by the Cities of Melbourne and Sydney is underway, with results expected by mid-February 2018. This ‘read’ will provide a baseline of the narratives that are currently gaining traction in Australia, the extent of the engagement and the values that are evident in the engagement.

A focus on climate change solutions can address the lack of action on and fraught national debate about climate change. Multiple sources suggest that Australians are supportive of solutions such as renewable energy more than they are convinced about the science of climate change.

Further testing is needed to determine how palatable and helpful the terms ‘carbon neutral’ and ‘net zero’ are in driving action.

## References

Brook, J., & Clark, S. (2015). *The Ipsos Climate Change Report*. Retrieved from [http://ipsos.com.au/ipsos\\_docs/CC2015/Ipsos\\_Climate\\_Change\\_Report\\_2015.pdf](http://ipsos.com.au/ipsos_docs/CC2015/Ipsos_Climate_Change_Report_2015.pdf)

ClimateWorks Australia (2015). *Zero by 2050 Qualitative Research*. Unpublished

Colmar Brunton (2017). *Queensland Household Energy Survey 2016: Summary Presentation*. Prepared for: Energex, Ergon Network, Powerlink, 9 February 2017.

Douglas, T (2017). *Research & Communications - Findings on Renewable Energy & Climate Change*. Commissioned by Essential Media

Edelman (2017), *Edelman Trust Barometer 2017*.

Hine, D.W., Reser, J. Phillips, W. Cooksey, R. Nunn, R., Marks, A.D.G., Watt, Bradley, G., & Glendon, I. (2013). Identifying climate change interpretive communities in a large Australian sample. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 36, 229-239.

Holmes, T., Blackmore, E., Hawkins, R., & Wakeford, T. (2012). *The Common Cause Handbook*. United Kingdom: Public Interest Research Centre.

Jones, C., Hine, D.W., & Marks, A.D.G. (2016). The future is now: Reducing psychological distance to increase public engagement with climate change. *Risk Analysis*. doi: 10.1111/risa.12601.

Laris, S. (2016). *Mainstreaming Stage One Report*. Commissioned by ClimateWorks Australia.

Page, B. I., & Shapiro, R.Y (1983). Effects of Public Opinion on Policy. *The American Political Science Review*, 77 (1), 175–190. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/1956018](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1956018)

The Climate Institute, (2017). *Climate of the Nation 2017: Australian Attitudes on Climate Change*.

UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (1992). Article 4 of the Convention - Commitments. Retrieved from [http://unfccc.int/files/essential\\_background/background\\_publications\\_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveg.pdf#page=17](http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveg.pdf#page=17)

UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (1992). Article 6 of the Convention - Action for Climate Empowerment. Retrieved from [http://unfccc.int/files/essential\\_background/background\\_publications\\_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveg.pdf#page=17](http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/application/pdf/conveg.pdf#page=17)