

Ipsos Climate Change Report 2016



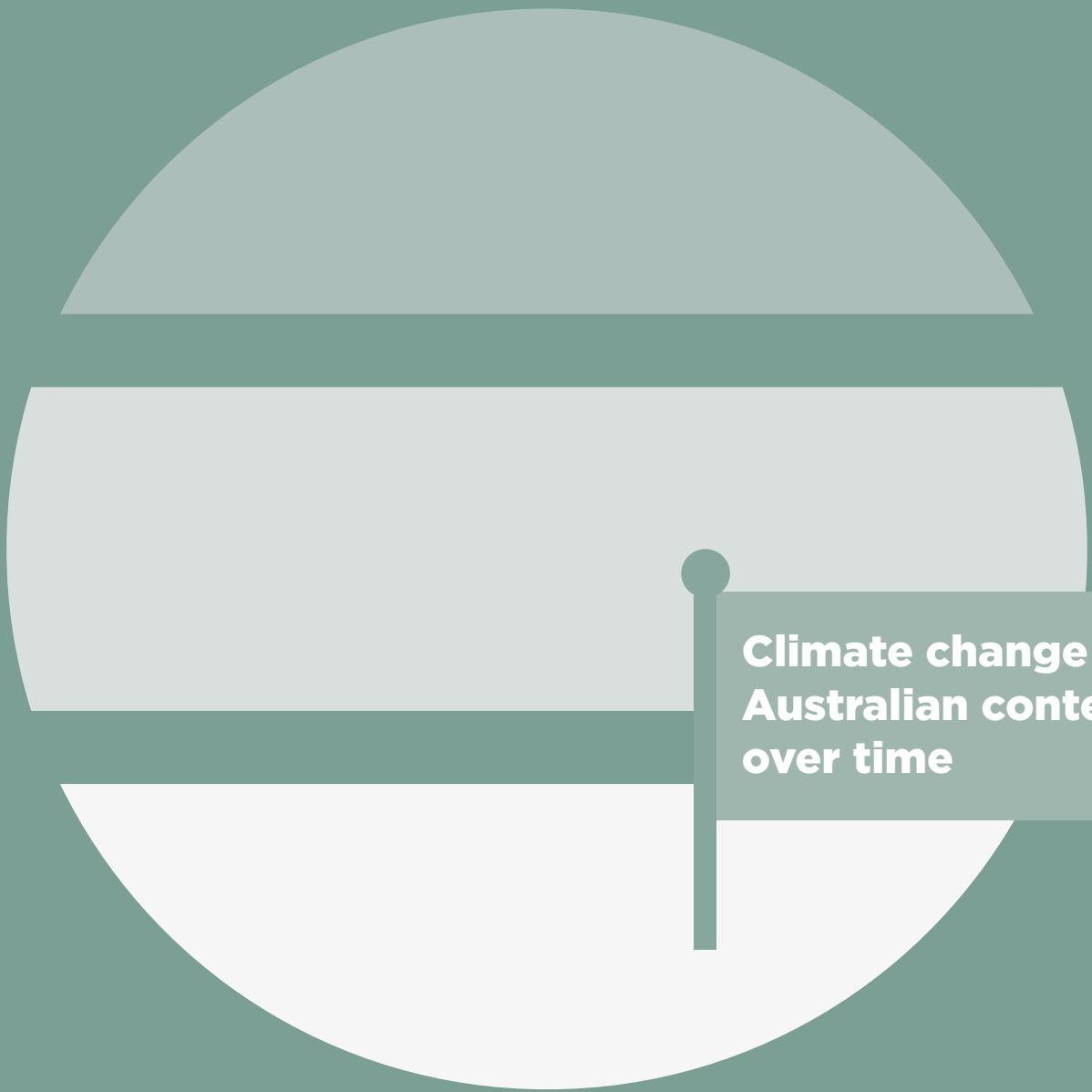
This report presents the findings of the annual Climate Change research conducted by Ipsos Social Research Institute. The 2016 edition is the tenth consecutive year we have asked Australians their views on environmental topics with a focus on climate change.

The research is conducted among a nationally representative sample of more than 1,000 Australians.



Contents

Climate change in Australian context over time	p.4
What issues would Australians take action on if they were in charge of making decisions for the country?	p.8
Does human activity play a role in climate change?	p.12
What do we think is causing climate change?...	p.16
Australians want action on climate change	p.20
We believe climate change has serious implications, but how imminent do we think the impacts are?	p.24
Who should lead the charge on addressing climate change? ...and how effective are they? ...	p.28
In summary.. ..	p.32



**Climate change in
Australian context
over time**

Long-term trends show that Australia's climate has warmed by 0.90C since 1920

This report presents the findings of the annual Climate Change research conducted by Ipsos Social Research Institute. The 2016 edition is the tenth consecutive year we have asked Australians their views on environmental topics with a focus on climate change. The research is conducted among a nationally representative sample of more than 1,000 Australians.¹

The past 12 months have marked a period of action for climate change policy, including the release of Australia's 2030 climate change target as part of the country's commitment to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21). Along with 170 other countries, Australia signed the Paris Agreement in April 2016. COP22² was held in Marrakech, Morocco in November this year and marked the first formal meeting of parties to the Paris Agreement.

The Federal Government plans to meet the targets set out in the Paris Agreement through direct action policies that aim to reduce emissions, increase energy productivity, reduce waste, increase the amount of energy derived from renewable sources and improve the health of soils and the environment.³

As the year comes to an end, it looks likely that, globally, 2016 will be the warmest on record⁴ (2015 holds the current record). Long-term trends show that Australia's climate has warmed by 0.90C since 1920.

This increase is greater than the global mean temperature rise of 0.850C, with Australia experiencing more extreme heat and fewer cool extremes, with temperatures projected to increase. Extreme fire weather has increased and the fire season has lengthened across large parts of our nation since 1970.⁵ The autumn of 2016 was the warmest on record⁶, and was followed by the wettest winter recorded in Australia since 1900, with an unusually strong El Niño at the beginning of 2016 contributing to this period.⁷

So what do Australians know and think about changes to our climate? Do they believe Australia is impacted by climate change? What is their understanding of the causes of climate change? What action do they believe should be taken and by whom? And how effective do they believe those taking action on climate change are? These are some of the questions this report seeks to answer.

¹ Participants were recruited from Ipsos' online MyView panel. Quotas were set on the age and gender of respondents, and post-weighted to ensure an exact match of the Australian population. In total n=1,023 respondents were surveyed. Fieldwork took place in October 2016.

² The 22nd session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

³ <https://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/f29a8ccb-77ca-4be1-937d-78985e53ac63/files/factsheet-australian-government-action.pdf>

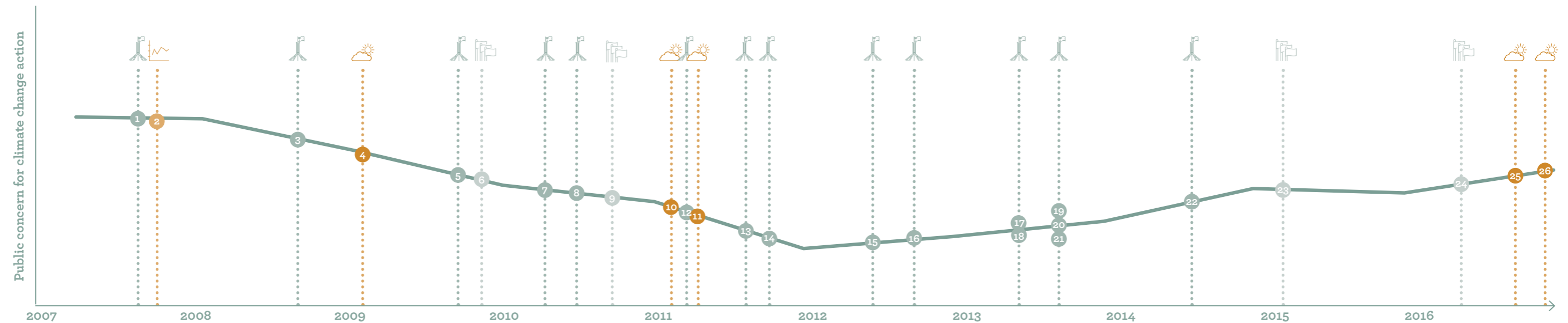
⁴ <https://www.ncd.c.noaa.gov/sotc/>

⁵ Bureau of Meteorology, 2014, 'State of the Climate 2014'

⁶ <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/current/statements/scs56.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/updates/articles/a021.shtml>

Climate Change as a Top Issue for Action: in context over time



2007

- December:** Kevin Rudd elected as Prime Minister, Rudd ratifies the Kyoto Protocol to limit greenhouse gas emissions.
- Global Financial Crisis (GFC) starts.

2008

- October:** first of Australia's Economic stimulus packages launched in response to GFC.

2009

- February:** Black Saturday bushfires across SA and VIC.
- November:** Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, Australia's cap-&-trade scheme fails to pass the Senate.
- December:** UN talks in Copenhagen fail to reach a binding agreement to limit global warming.

2010

- April:** Rudd government delays the carbon pricing scheme until after Kyoto agreement.
- June:** leadership spill sees Gillard replace Rudd as Prime Minister & Gillard delays commitment to the carbon tax.
- December:** (UNFCCC) Cancun, Mexico — the Cancun talks, the largest initiative to date on climate talks, new institutions developed Green Climate Fund, Technology Mechanism, and Adaptation Framework.

2011

- January:** major flooding in Queensland and NSW sees a flood peak of 4.46m in Brisbane.
- February:** Cyclone Yasi (category 5) hits Queensland and causes mass damage to the region.
- February:** The Australian Climate Commission established to provide reliable and authoritative information on climate change with Professor Tim Flannery as the Chief Commissioner.
- September:** Clean Energy Bill passed.
- November:** the carbon tax passes the Senate.

2012

- April:** Clean Energy Regulator established to measure, reduce and offset Australia's carbon emissions.
- July:** the carbon tax comes into effect.

2013

- July:** Rudd becomes Prime Minister (again).
- July:** Rudd changes carbon tax to emissions trading scheme.
- September:** Tony Abbott becomes 28th Prime Minister of Australia.
- September:** The new Coalition Government disbands the Climate Commission and introduces legislation to repeal the carbon pricing scheme.
- September:** Tim Flannery announces the launch of the Climate Council, crowdfunding used to finance the NFP organisation.

2014

- July:** Carbon pricing mechanism repeal came into effect.

2015

- COP21 Paris held.

2016

- COP22 Marrakech held.
- Warmest year on record.
- Wettest winter in Australia since 1900.

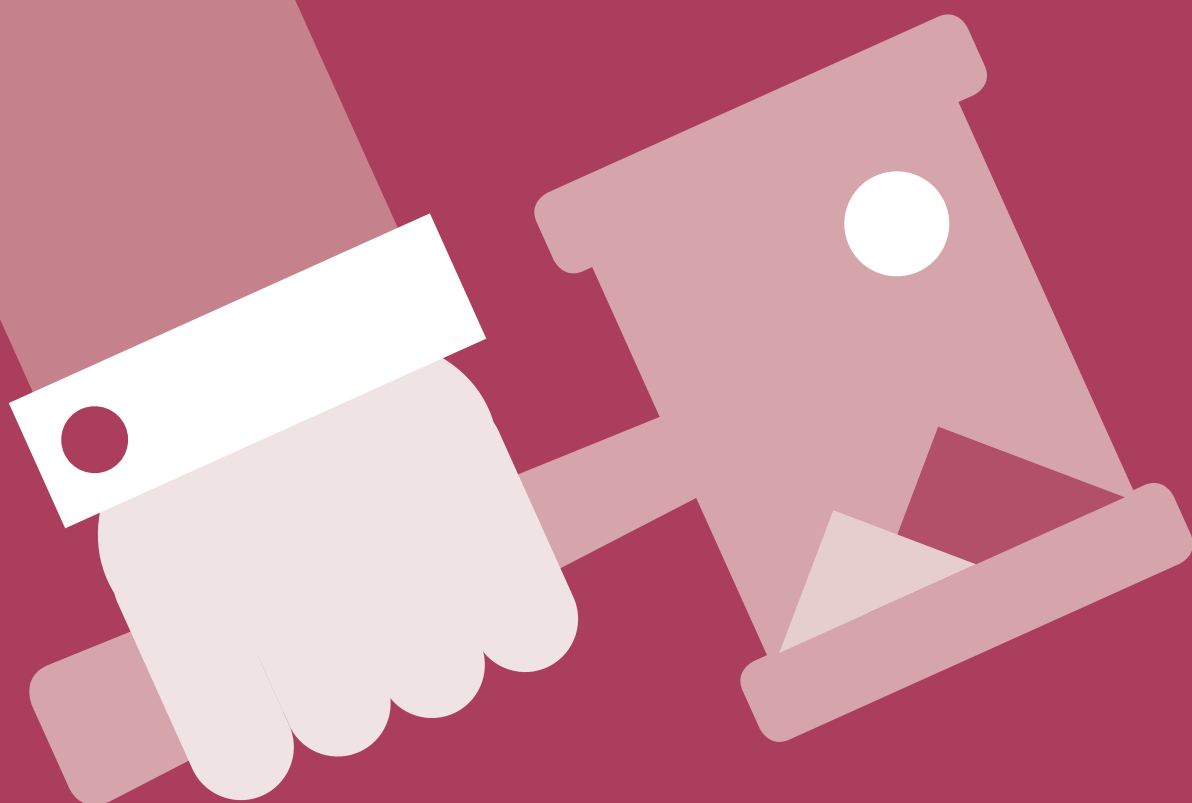
 Australian government / legislative

 Economy

 Extreme weather events

 United Nations climate councils

**What environmental issues
would Australians take action on
if they were in charge of making
decisions for the country?**



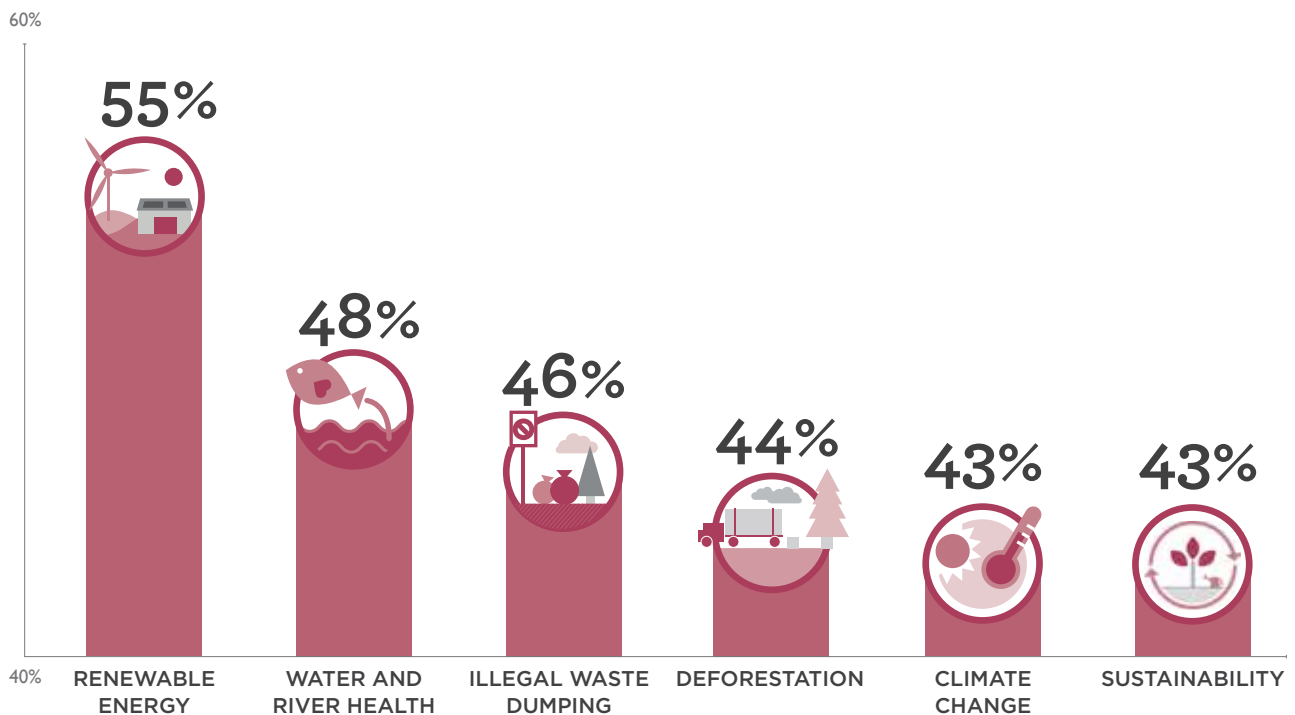
Renewable energy has topped the list of environmental issues for the last five years

In order to establish the environmental priorities of the public, we asked Australians which environmental issues they would take action on if they were in charge of making decisions for Australia.

Figure 1 over-page indicates the top six environmental issues as identified by Australians in 2016.

Four of these remain from 2015. However, deforestation/reforestation has climbed eight percentage points to re-emerge as a top-six priority for the first time since 2012 (when it was in fifth place at 44%), and sustainability has risen six percentage points (43%), its highest rating since 2010.

Top issues for action, 2016



Source: Ipsos Climate Change Survey 2016

Base: All respondents

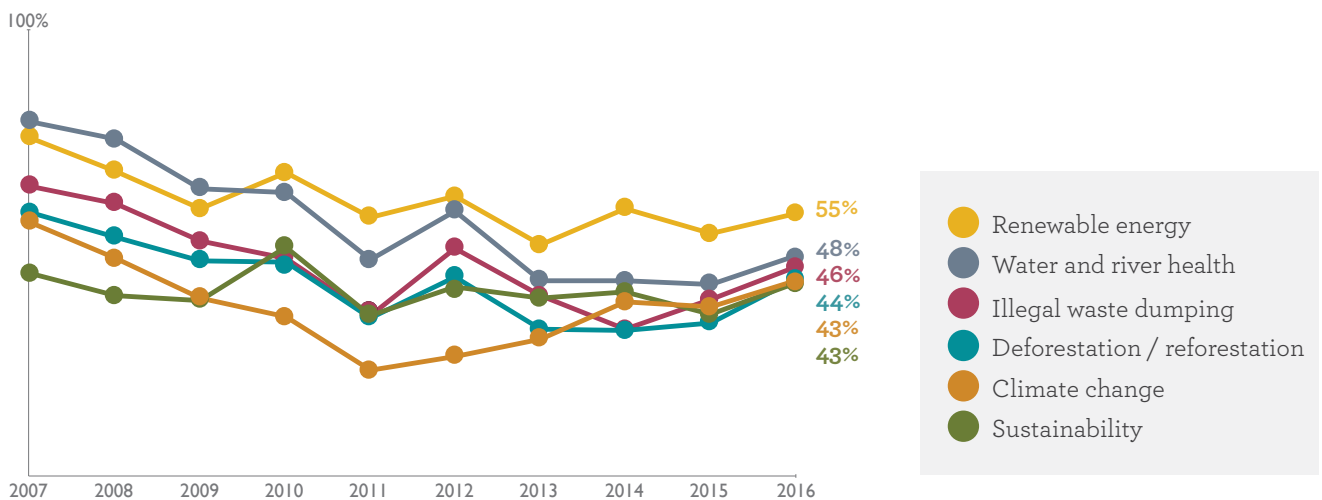
Q1. If you were in charge of making decisions for Australia, select the issues below that you would address or take action on...

Renewable energy has topped the list of environmental issues for the last five years. It is up three percentage points in 2016, to 55%. This finding supports other research stating that Australians are more favourable towards renewable sources of energy than non-renewables.⁸

Climate change remains a top six priority in 2016, making a significant jump with more than two-in-five Australians (43%) believing it to be a top priority for action. This year climate change

hits its highest rating since 2008 (47%). Climate change was very much on the agenda that year – during the November 2007 Australian Federal election, climate change featured heavily throughout the campaign (it was even referred to as the world’s first climate change election⁹). This kept up momentum for several years, with debate around the Kyoto protocol and the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* drawing attention to the issue. Concern dissipated around 2009 during the global financial crisis.

Figure 1.
Top issues for action 2016, over time.



Source: Ipsos Climate Change Survey 2016

Base: All respondents

Q1. If you were in charge of making decisions for Australia, select the issues below that you would address or take action on...

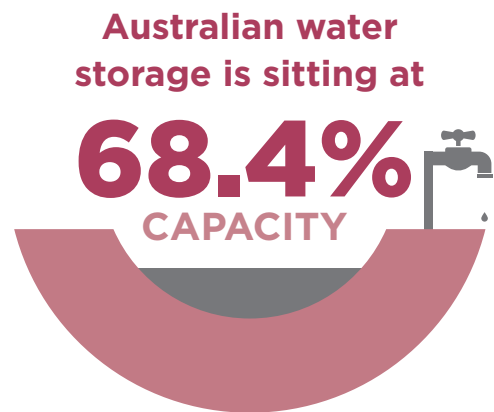
⁸Ipsos Public Affairs, 2016, http://www.ipsos.com.au/Ipsos_docs/Solar-Report_2015/Ipsos-ARENA_SolarReport.pdf

⁹Glover, J., 2007, 'The lucky country?', retrieved 24/11/2016, < <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2007/nov/23/climatechange.australia>>, The Guardian

Climate change re-emerged as an individual issue in 2014, and this trend appears to be continuing. International events such as the Paris COP21 Agreement have seen political gridlock around climate change slowly clearing. In addition, climate change was again an election issue for Australians in 2016. An analysis of 150,000 conversations on social media for the first three weeks of the 2016 election campaign revealed that climate change was a key theme discussed about for both Turnbull and Shorten¹⁰.



In 2015, both drought and bushfires spiked (to sixth and third place respectively), but 2016 sees these two issues once again exiting the top six issues. Drought dropped a significant 12 percentage points to sit at position 22 and bushfire has dropped six percentage points to sit as the tenth most important priority to address.



With regards to drought, as mentioned previously, the winter of 2016 in Australia was the second wettest recorded since 1900 and currently Australian water storage is sitting at 68.4% capacity (compared with 56.6% at the same time in 2015), perhaps indicating why this issue has slipped further down the list.

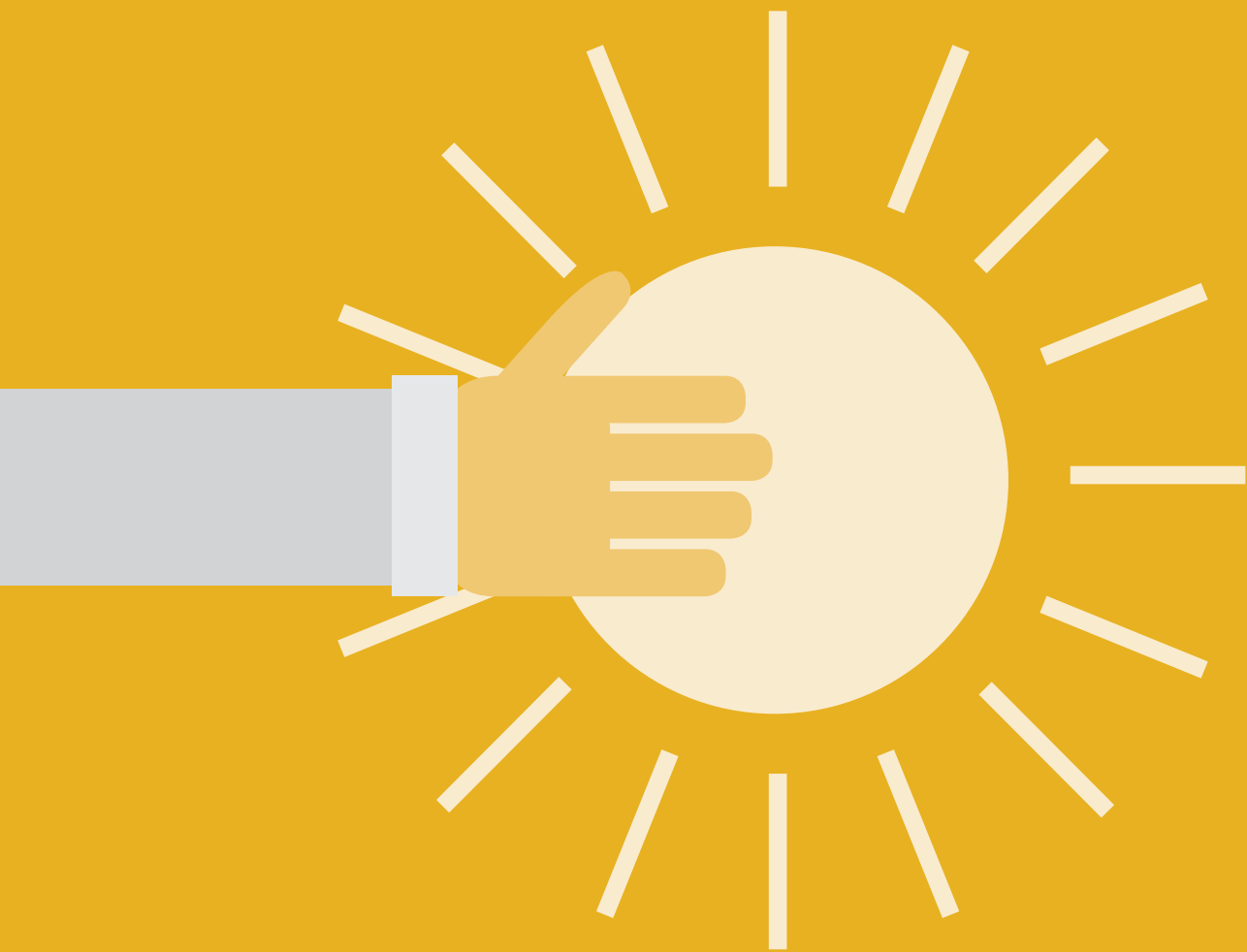
Concern about bushfires is still significant with it being one of Australians' top ten concerns, however the drop from third place could be explained by the fact that Australian states have implemented new ways of reducing the risk of bushfire such as the 'Safer Together' approach,¹² therefore it is feasible that the Australian public feels that the risk of bushfire is already being managed.

¹⁰ SBS, 2016, 'Social media users lay into leaders', retrieved 24/11/2016, < <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2016/06/09/social-media-users-lay-leaders> >

¹¹ Bureau of Meteorology, 2016, 'Water Storage', retrieved 20/12/2016, <http://water.bom.gov.au/waterstorage/awris/>, Australian Government)

¹² DELWP, 2016, 'Safer Together: A new approach to reducing the risk of bushfire in Victoria', retrieved 24/11/2016, < <http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/safer-together> >, State Government of Victoria

**Does human activity play
a role in climate change?**



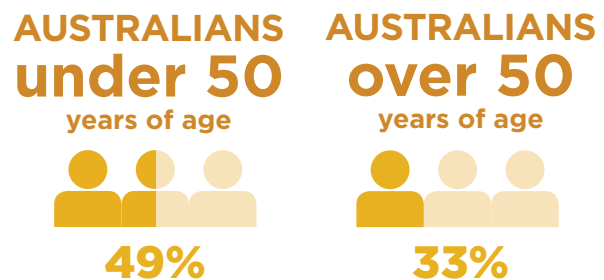
The vast majority of us think that climate change is real, and happening now.

The views of Australians on the processes that cause climate change have remained remarkably stable over the past decade. No significant changes have been observed over this time in the proportion of respondents who believe that climate change is caused by human activity and natural processes.

The vast majority of us think that climate change is real, and happening now. In 2016, only 4% believe that “there is no such thing as climate change”. Just one in 10 (10%) believe that climate change is mainly or entirely caused by natural processes.

Two-in-five (42%) believe that human activity is mainly or entirely responsible for climate change. Slightly fewer believe that “climate change is partly caused by natural processes and partly caused by human activity” (39%).

As reported in previous editions of the Ipsos Climate Change Report, beliefs about anthropogenic impacts on climate change are most heavily split along generational lines. Almost half of all Australians under 50 years of age (49%) believe that human activity mainly or entirely causes climate change. This is significantly more than those aged 50 and older (33%).



“human activity mainly or entirely causes climate change”

Voting intention is also closely linked to views on climate change. Australians that vote Labor (50%) or Greens (74%) are significantly more likely to attribute climate change to a greater human involvement. This is also the case for those who are university educated (49%).

Just a small minority, at 4%, believe there is no such thing as climate change. The vast majority believe climate change is happening and we are seeing the lowest agreement with the statement ‘the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated’ since we started measuring it in 2010 (28%).

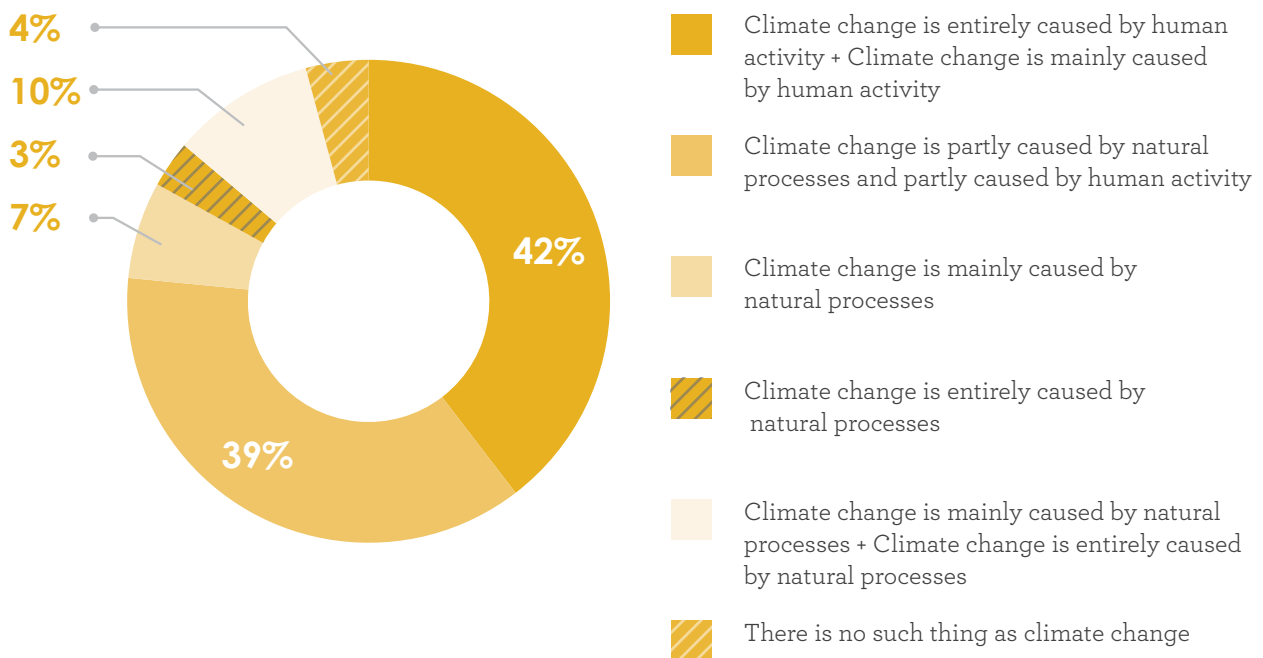
Despite this, there are still more than two-in-five agreeing with the statement ‘There are too many conflicting opinions for the public to be confident about claims made around climate change’ (45%). However, this agreement has reduced by seven percentage points since we started measuring this three years ago.

According to 45% of Australians:

“There are too many conflicting opinions for the public to be confident about claims made around climate change”



Figure 2. Human activity / natural processes as causes of climate change 2016



Source: Ipsos Climate Change Survey 2016

Base: All respondents

CC3. What best describes your opinion about the causes of climate change?

What do we think is causing climate change?

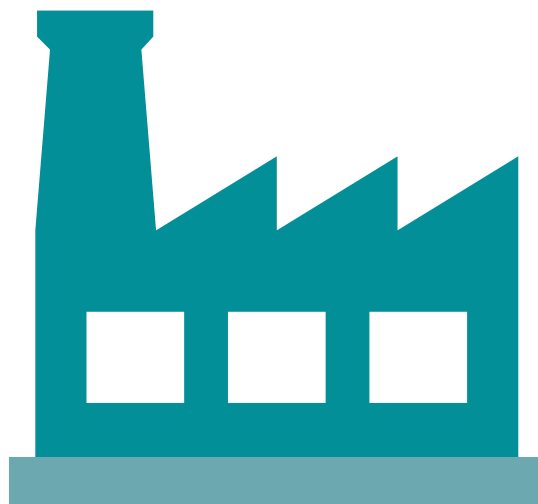


'Greenhouse gas emissions from industry' has consistently rated as the top cause every year

Since 2010, we have asked Australians their opinion on what the specific activities and phenomena that cause climate change are. 'Greenhouse gas emissions from industry' has consistently rated as the top cause every year

with three-in-five participants (60%) selecting this as a cause. Rounding out the top five causes were the 'burning of fossil fuels' (58%), 'deforestation' (53%), 'motor vehicle emissions' (51%) and 'air pollution' (50%).

According to 58% of Australians:
'burning of fossil fuels' is a top cause of climate change



On a two party preferred basis, Labor voters were significantly more likely to select the top five causes than Liberal voters.

Top 5 causes, divided by Liberal and Labor voters

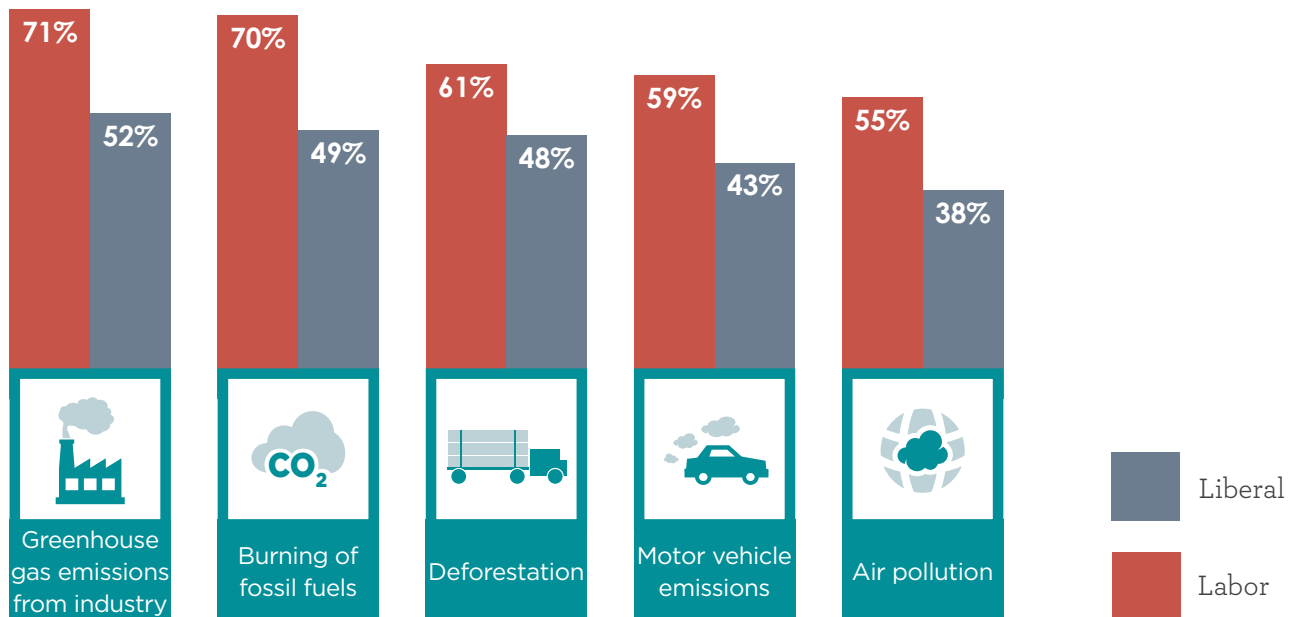
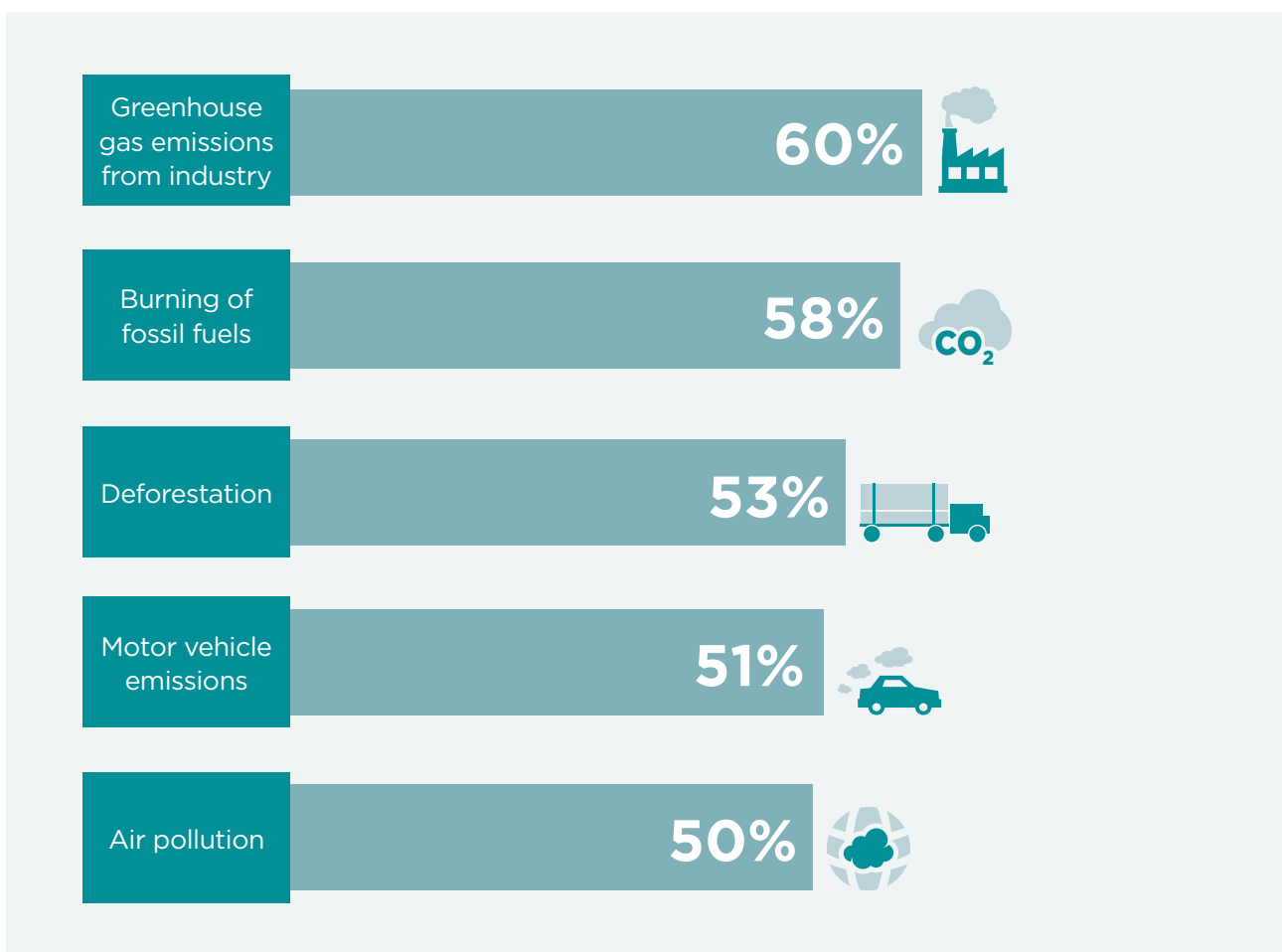


Figure 3.
Top factors Australians believe cause climate change

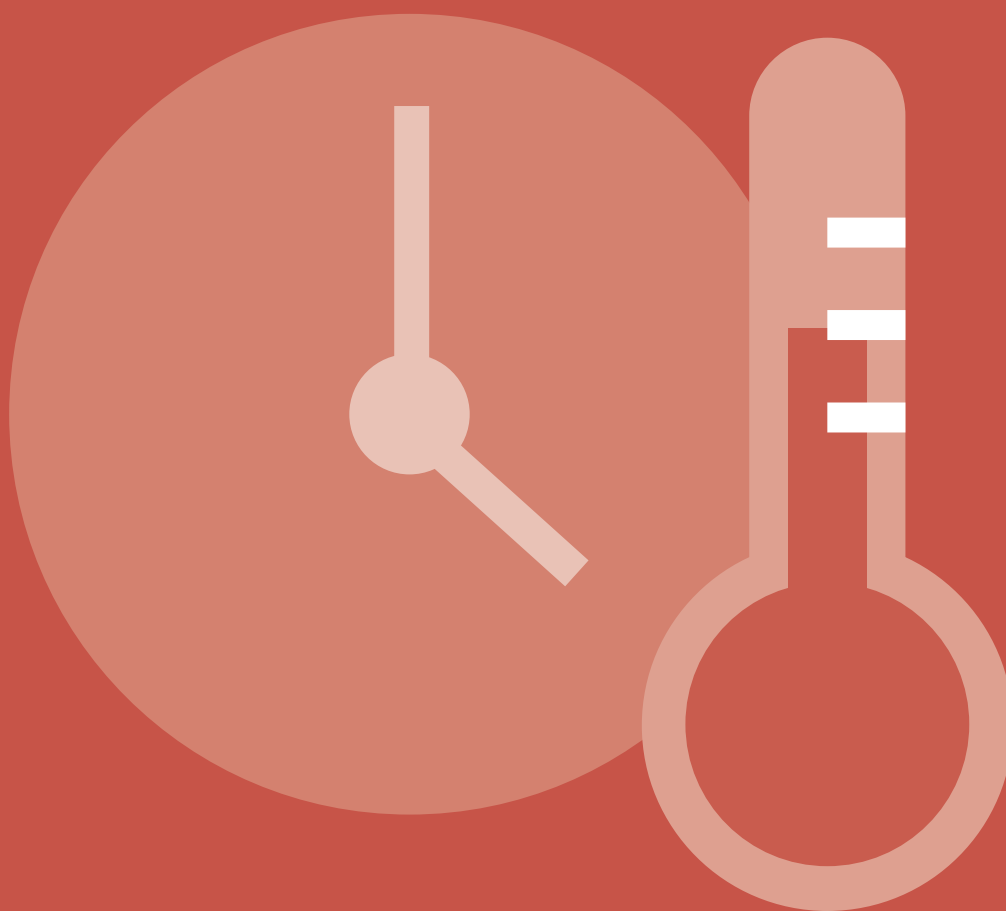


Source: Ipsos Climate Change Survey 2016

Base: All respondents

Q2. What would you say are the specific activities or things that cause climate change?

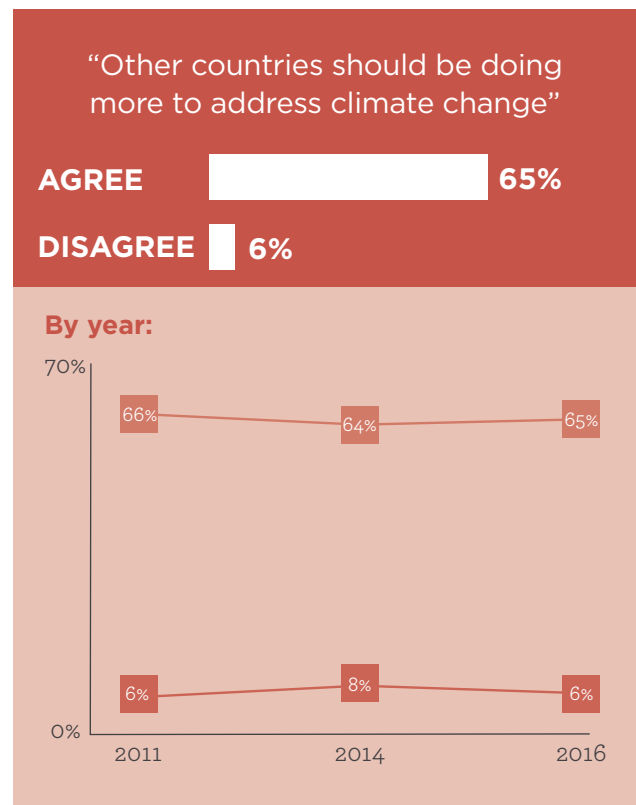
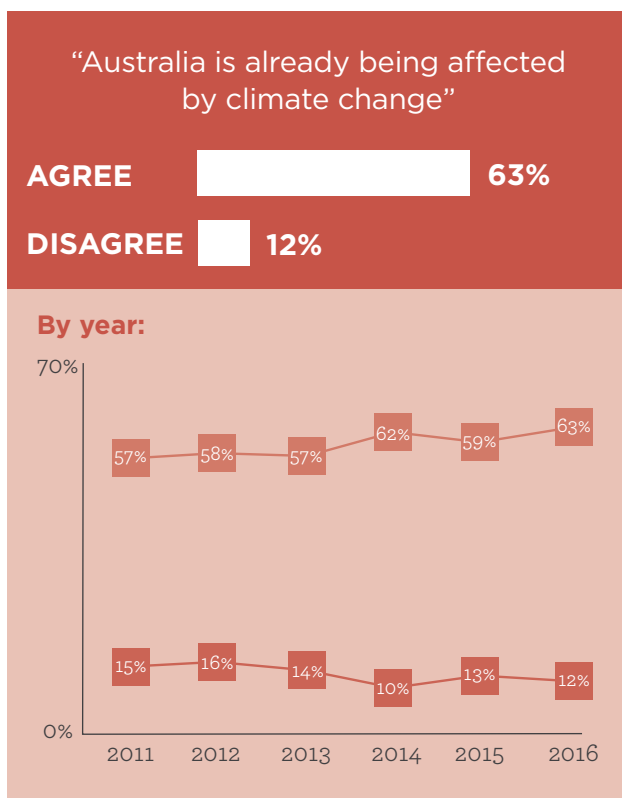
Australians want action on climate change



there is an increasing openness to spending more to make more environmentally responsible purchasing choices

As already established, a majority of Australians believe that climate change exists, reflected in the fact that they also believe it is already having an impact, and that impact is going to have serious implications.

Not only was there was a high level of agreement that climate change poses a serious threat to our way of life over the next 100 years (67% understood this to be the case), we saw the highest ever levels of agreement with the statement ‘Australia is already being affected by climate change’ (63%).

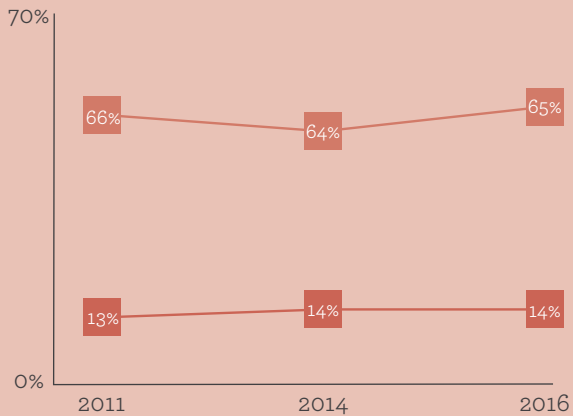


Furthermore, most want more action taken to tackle climate change with three-in-five agreeing that ‘other countries should be doing more to address climate change’ (65%) and more than half believing that ‘Australia ought to be doing more’ (59%).

“Australia should be doing more to address climate change”

AGREE **59%**
DISAGREE **14%**

By year:

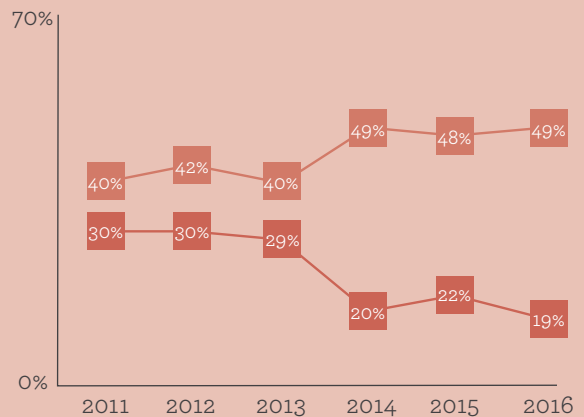


Although agreement was lower in 2011, 2012, and 2013, we see that over the last three years consistently almost one in every two Australians agrees with the statement ‘I would vote in favour of a proposal to spend tax payers’ money on projects designed to fight climate change’ (49% in 2016).

“I would vote in favour of a proposal to spend taxpayers money on projects designed to fight climate change”

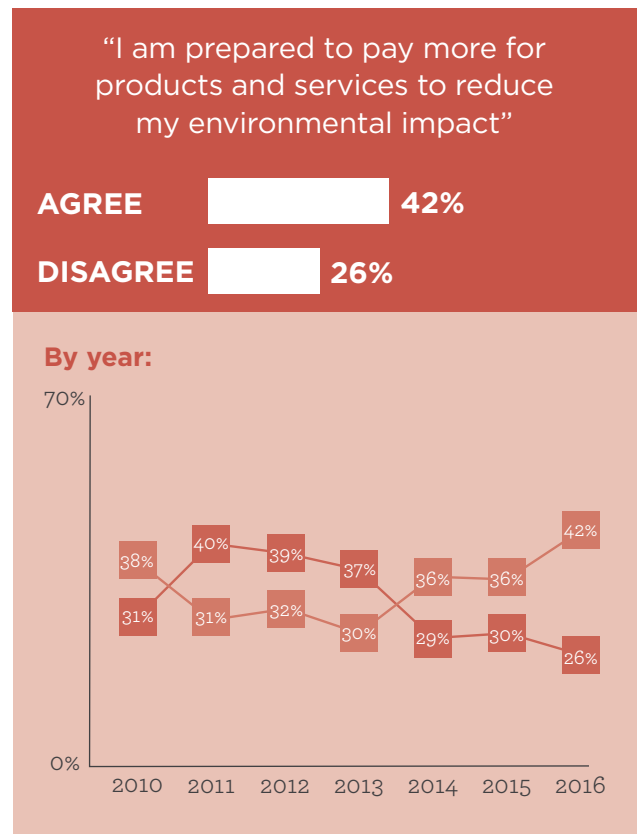
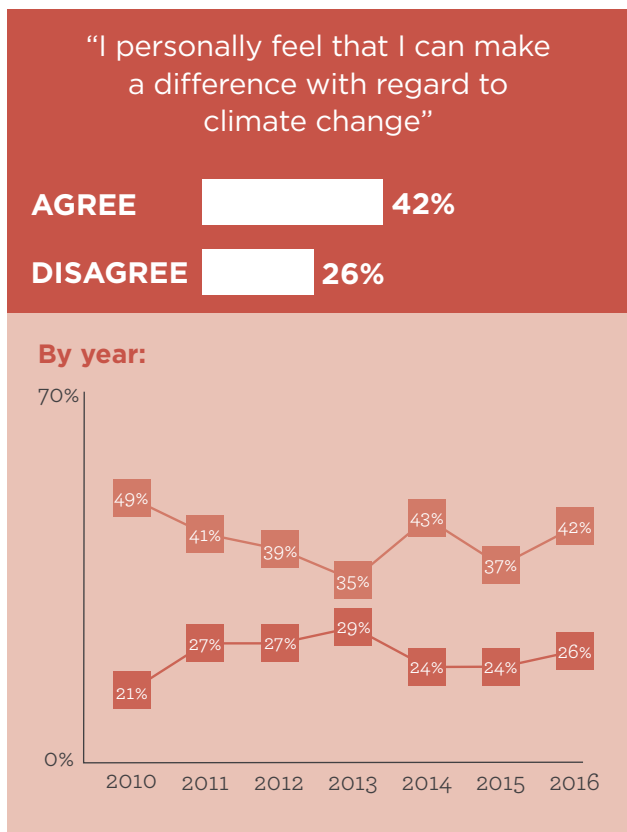
AGREE **49%**
DISAGREE **19%**

By year:



With regards to personal actions to address climate change there doesn't appear to be a huge conviction that individuals can make that much of an impact: 42% agree they can personally make a difference, but around a quarter (26%) disagree. Of those who think climate change is mainly or entirely caused by natural processes, just 10% believe they can make a difference.

But it does appear that there is an increasing openness to spending more to make more environmentally responsible purchasing choices. Agreement with the statement 'I am prepared to pay more for products and services to reduce my environmental impact' is the highest since we started measuring (42%).



We believe climate change has serious implications, but how imminent do we think the impacts are?



a majority of Australians believe that climate change is already having an impact

Since 2014, we have presented a range of ecological issues and, for each, asked Australians whether they thought climate change is already a cause, or how many years until climate change would cause it (or whether climate change would not cause it at all). Respondents were also given the option to choose 'I don't know'. It is clear that a majority of Australians believe that climate change is already having an impact on many of these issues.

Consistent with previous Ipsos Climate Change Reports, extreme weather events and other natural phenomena were most likely to be selected as being caused by climate change.

The top five processes that the respondents believe climate change to be already causing were:



More frequent and / or extreme droughts (58%)



More frequent and / or extreme storm events (57%)



More frequent and / or extreme bushfires (56%)



Destruction of the Great Barrier Reef (55%)

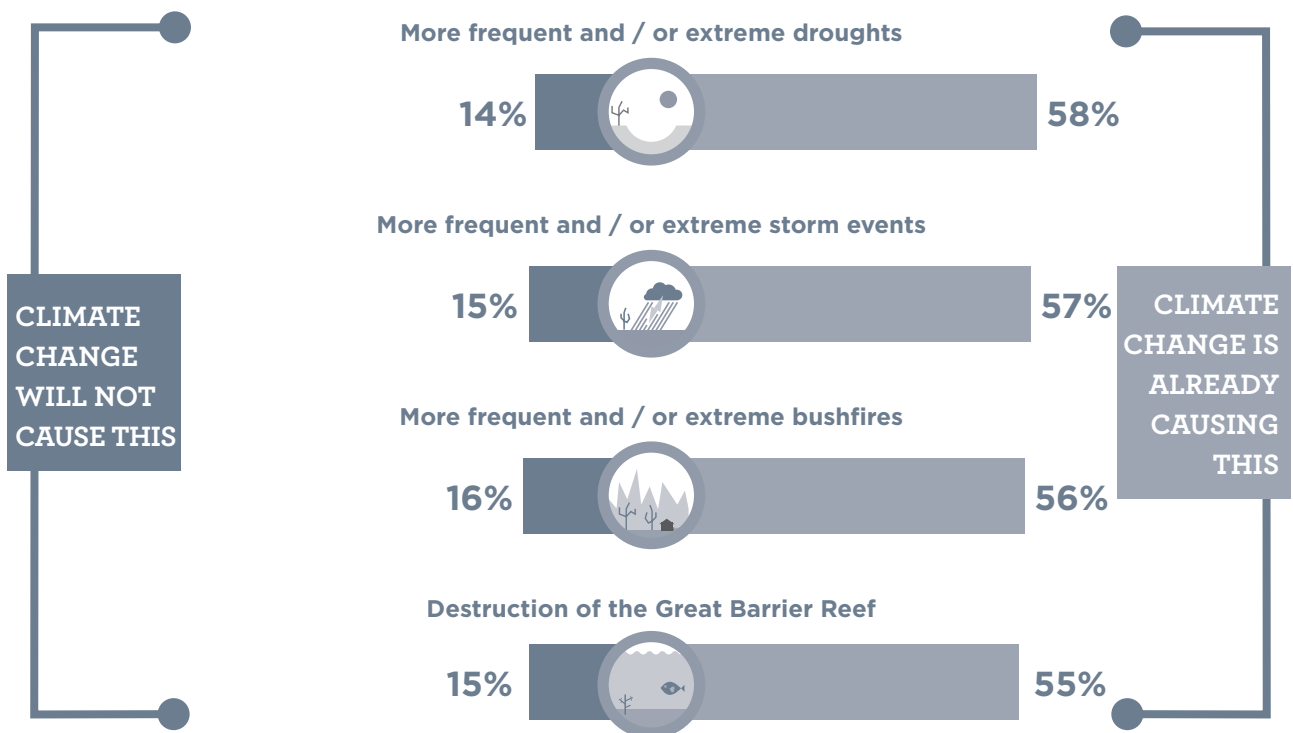


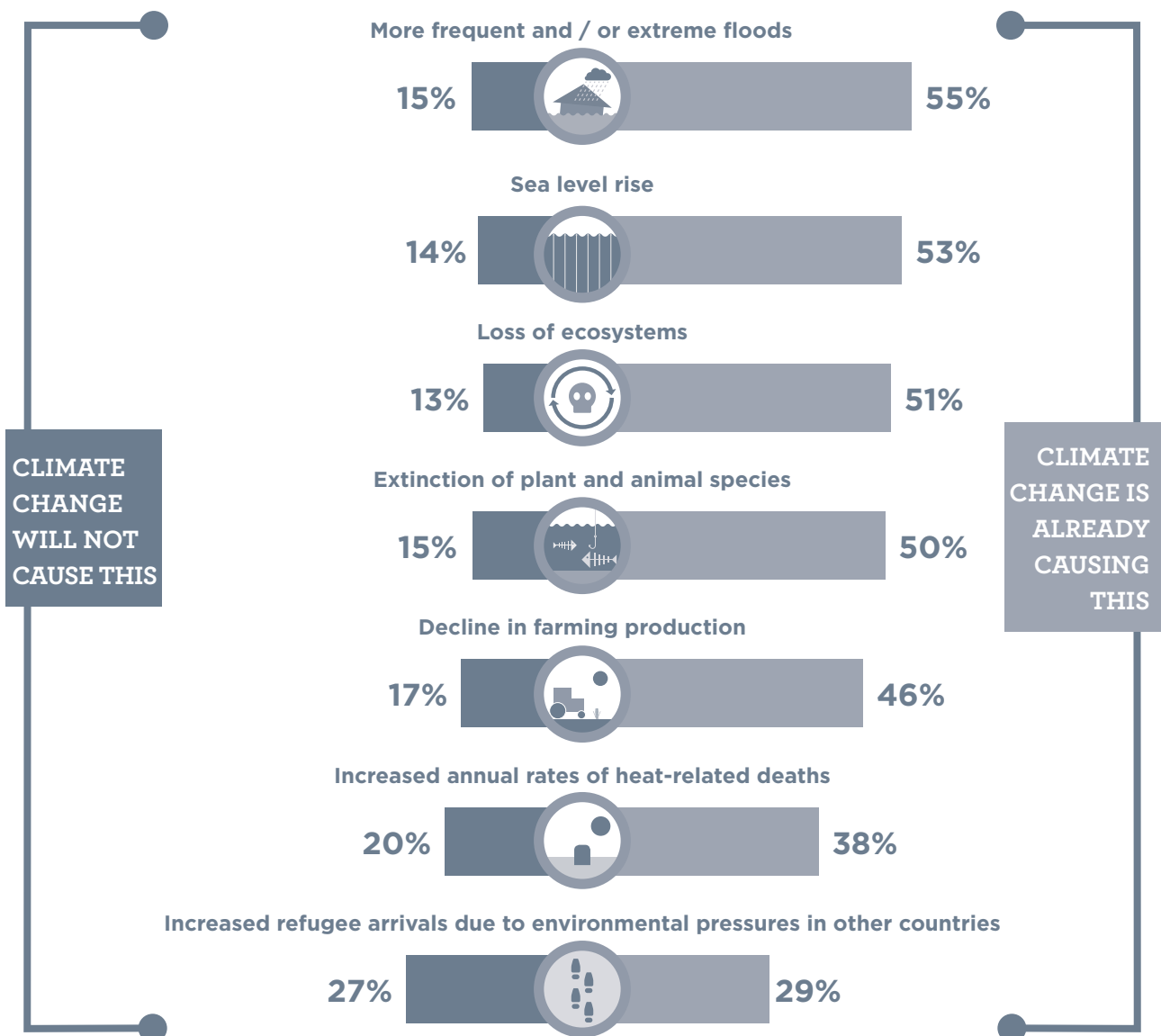
More frequent and / or extreme floods (55%)

This top five list is interesting as it highlights some discrepancies. We saw before that drought and bushfires have slipped down the list of things that Australians would take action on, yet they are most likely to believe that climate change is already causing these processes. Additionally, more than a third of Australians think that climate change is causing rising sea levels, yet only 22% would take action on this.

Australians are less sure about the climate change impacts that affect social and health aspects, almost one-in-four (38%) indicated they think climate change is already causing increased annual rates of heat-related deaths and around a third (29%) believe that climate change is already causing increased refugee arrivals due to environmental pressures in other countries.

Figure 4.
When, if at all, will climate change cause...





Source: Ipsos Climate Change Survey 2016

Base: All respondents

CC7: In how many years, if at all, do you think climate change will cause the following in Australia?



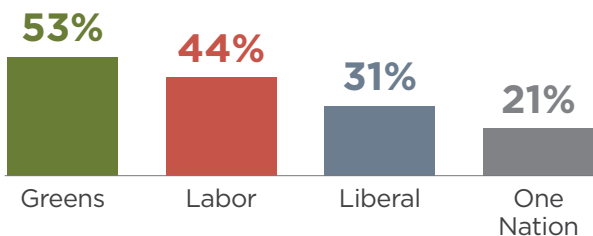
**Who should lead the charge
on addressing climate change?
...and how effective are they?**

Australians do not seem to think anyone is doing a particularly good job of addressing climate change

As seen at Figure 5, the Federal Government (37%) continues to be identified as most responsible for taking action, followed by the international community (19%). Greens and Labor voters are more likely to identify Federal Government (53% and 44% respectively) than Liberal voters (31%) and National voters (21%).

Federal Government

Responsibility for action on climate change by party preferences



For those who think that climate change is mostly/entirely the result of human activity, two-in-five (44%) believe that the Federal Government is most responsible, with only 21% of those who think that climate change is mostly/entirely due to natural processes choosing the Federal Government, and one-in-five (22%) believing that no-one is responsible.

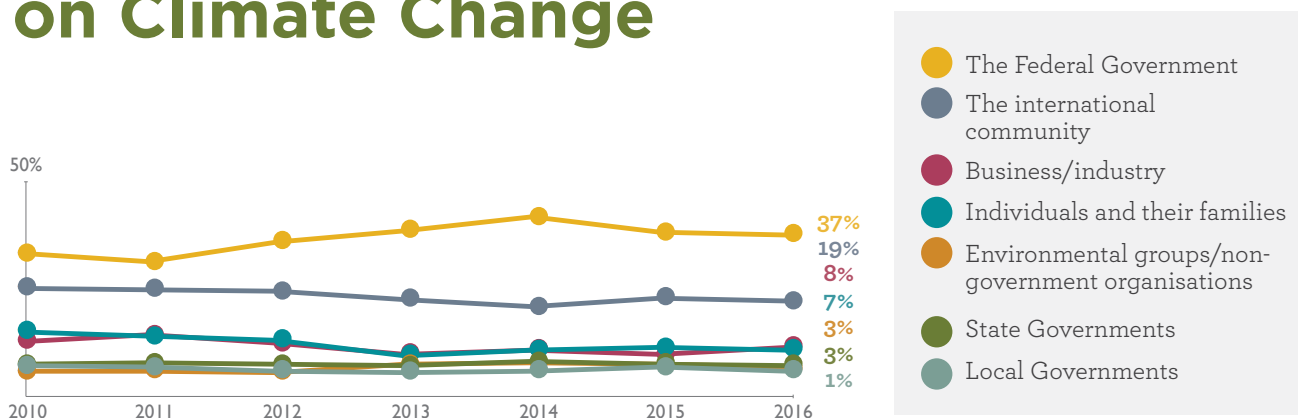
Only 8% of respondents replied that individuals and their families should be mainly responsible for action on climate change. This suggests that although a majority of the Australian public is ready and willing to engage to tackle climate change, they are looking to the Government for guidance and support.

Australians do not seem to think anyone is doing a particularly good job of addressing climate change. Of the four groups we tested, state governments appeared to be doing best, 20% rated their performance as good (2% very good, 17% fairly good), followed by the international community and the Federal Government (both 18% good) and finally business / industry (15% good). Therefore, even though state governments

are less likely to be considered mostly responsible, they are more likely to be regarded as doing a good job (in a relative sense).

Unsurprisingly, given the Coalition is in government, Labor voters were more likely to regard the Federal Government's performance as good (26%) compared with Liberal voters (12%) on a two party preferred basis.

Figure 5. Responsibility for action on Climate Change



Source: Ipsos Climate Change Survey 2007-2016

Base: All respondents

Q8. Who should be mainly responsible for action on climate change?

Those who think that climate change is mostly/entirely the result of human activity are significantly more likely to believe that the Federal Government (58%), state governments (56%) and business and industry (55%) are doing a poor (very poor/fairly poor) job of responding to climate change than those who believe that climate change is mostly/entirely the result of natural processes.

In line with the ongoing view that the Federal Government is the body most responsible for action on climate change, we asked Australians how they thought the government should deal with climate change. A third (33%) believe that the Australian Government should be tackling climate change regardless of the impact on economic growth; a similar proportion (36%) are less bullish and think government should take whatever actions necessary to deal with climate change, but only if it does not harm economic growth.

Greens voters (68%) and Labor voters (40%) were more likely to think action should be taken even if it harms economic growth. Those who thought climate change is caused entirely/mostly by human activity were more likely to want the government to take action in this way too (55%), as did those who were university educated (37%) and Victorians (37%).

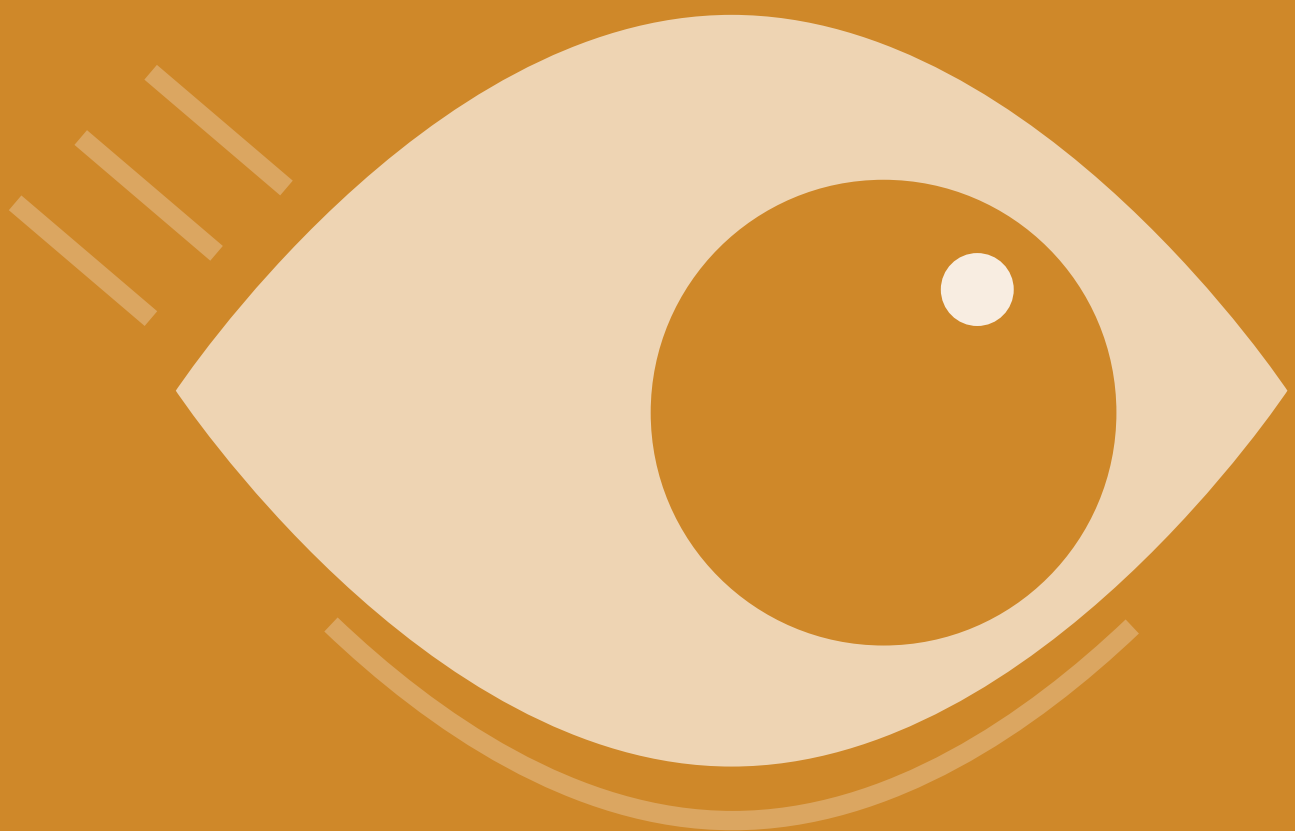
1 in 3
AUSTRALIANS



believe the Australian Government should be tackling climate change regardless of the impact on economic growth

Liberal voters (45%) were more likely to want action only if it did not harm economic growth and those who believe climate change is entirely or mainly caused by natural processes were likely to think government action on climate change should only take place if it increases economic growth (30%).

In summary...



action on climate change must be taken sooner rather than later

Clearly, the majority of Australians believe that climate change is real and that it is very likely to, if not already, have a serious impact across Australia. Since 2013, climate change has been a top priority for Australians but it is interesting to see that this is the highest level of concern we have measured to date.

There is continuing support for renewable energy and this is reflected by the fact that almost half of Australians agree that they would vote in favour of a proposal to spend tax-payers' money on projects designed to fight climate change. When considering responsibility with regards to action, most Australians continue to assert that the Federal Government should shoulder the responsibility for action on climate change.

However, it seems that the major roadblock for the largest proportion of Australians is the potential economic impact of action on climate change. Just over a third (36%) agree that the Government should take whatever actions necessary to deal with climate change but only if it does not harm economic growth, and 12% agree that it should only take action to deal with climate change if it also increases economic growth.

Perhaps the question of whether action should be taken at economic cost is too simplistic. A study undertaken by researchers at Stanford University found that temperature change due to climate change could leave global GDP per capita 23% lower in 2100¹³, an indication that not only Australia's economy but also the global economy could, in fact, be harmed if we do not take action. Therefore, like the rest of the international community, Australia may find that in order to avoid long term pain, action on climate change must be taken sooner rather than later.



¹³ Worland, J., 2015, 'Climate change could wreck the global economy', retrieved 25/11/2016, < <http://time.com/4082328/climate-change-economic-impact/> >, Time Magazine

If you would like to know more about the Ipsos Climate Change Report or Ipsos Public Affairs, please contact Stuart Clark or Jennifer Brook.

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GAME CHANGERS

