

Climate of the Nation

Qualitative Research Final Report

Conducted for

The Climate Institute

June 2012

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1 BACKGROUND

The Climate Institute is seeking to build its position as an authoritative, insightful and trusted non-partisan voice in the domestic and international climate change debate. As TCI's flagship reports, 'Climate of the Nation' and the 'Global Review' are the primary vehicles to achieve this aim in 2012.

Both reports project TCI's holistic approach to climate change issues. At one end of the spectrum is TCI's expertise in credible public policy development and advocacy, at the other end is the organisation's deep understanding of human responses to the challenges and barriers of managing the risks of climate change.

TCI has produced a Climate of the Nation report annually since 2007. To date, the report has relied mainly on quantitative polling research to provide a snapshot of Australian attitudes towards climate change, policies and politics and where peoples' concerns sit relative to other major issues such as health, education, workplace relations and economic management.

In advance of the start of the carbon pricing scheme in July 2012 TCI decided to incorporate qualitative research into the Climate of the Nation report to capture a more deeply layered story, in addition to the headline quantitative figures.

The 2012 Climate of the Nation report can be found here:

<http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/climate-of-the-nation-2012.html>

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the 2012 Climate of the Nation research was to provide a balanced and open minded benchmark of attitudes to the issue of climate change and associated issues and to contain a deep and rigorous analysis, both quantitatively and qualitatively, of the pros and cons of climate change and its solutions.

This report is not complete without an overlay of quantitative research and for comparison some of this quantitative research will comprise a repeat of previously asked questions. However in 2012 TCI is looking for a much richer and nuanced story about Australian attitudes to climate change through the use of qualitative research.

More specifically, the research is intended to shed light on:

- Awareness and attitudes to climate science and solutions;
- Barriers to public acceptance of climate science, including any psychological barriers;
- Barriers to public understanding and acceptance of policy solutions;
- Impact of politics and political leaders;
- Influence of the media;
- Attitudes to climate solutions, e.g. energy efficiency, electric cars, technology, etc.

An overall objective of the research is to provide TCI with objective and insightful research based evidence to promote its position to political parties, the media and the Australian community.

TCI and supporters of action on climate change have also been battling a rearguard action against some very critical media reporting and political debate on the issue, especially on the issue of a carbon tax. This research seeks to inform balanced reporting and discussion of issues in relation to climate change.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research project was conducted as ten mini focus groups throughout Australia according to the following schedule:

| Group # | Date | Location | Area Type |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1-2 | 23rd April 2012 | Brisbane | Inner metropolitan |
| 3-4 | 24th April 2012 | Sydney | Inner metropolitan |
| 5-6 | 26th April 2012 | Ballarat | Regional |
| 7-8 | 30th April 2012 | Newcastle | Coal |
| 9-10 | 2nd May 2012 | Perth | Resources |

In each location, one group comprised a mix of 5-6 men and women aged 55+ years of age who were retired or semi-retired, whilst and one group comprised a mix of 5-6 men and women aged 25-54. Unless participants were occupied on household duties with dependent children, they were currently employed full time (or were so prior to retirement).

Participants were also assessed on their attitudes to climate change, with extremely favourable (9-10 on a 1-10 favourability scale) and extremely unfavourable (1-2 on a 1-10 favourability scale) views excluded.

Where possible, participants were recruited from 'marginal' Federal electorates, defined for the purposes of this research as ALP seats with a 'TPP swing to lose' margin of up to 10% and LNP seats with a 'TPP swing to lose' margin of up to 5%. Locations were chosen on the basis of recruiting participants from a spread of areas ranging from inner metropolitan and regional areas and coal and resource dependent areas.

4 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4.1 Attitudes to Climate Change

- **Thinking and attitudes on the issue of climate change are currently quite disparate and fragmented**, to the point where ordinary, everyday people have difficulty in describing climate change and its causes.
- There is confusion between causes and effects from an environmental perspective and in any case **the issue is almost completely political contextualized** by the contemporary carbon tax debate.
- In terms of causes, natural drivers receive as much focus as human contribution, but are often based on **vague scientific notions** or a perceptual response to an individual experience of the changing environment – the most consistent and compelling being **an observed ‘change in the seasons’**. A reliance of personal observations reveals a mistrust and lack of understanding of the available science.
- Climate change is often seen as being part of a continuous cycle of geological time proportions, but this is not inconsistent with a belief in man-made climate change, which many believe is speeding up the process of naturally induced climate change. **To focus only on anthropogenic climate change** (i.e. at the exclusion of natural causes) **is to deny the intuitive perspective and thinking** on this issue of many people.

4.2 Attitudes to Carbon Pricing

- Discussion about action on climate change typically degenerates into farce once politics and politicians enter the fray. **There is a deep cynicism about the motivations of all sides of politics** on this issue and any sense of environmental consideration is almost completely lost. There is an almost singular focus on the ‘carbon tax’ and the self-interested, short term vote implications for the parties.
- People have a distinct **mistrust of politicians** on the issue of climate change **and similarly anyone who has a vested interest in the outcome of the debate**, including proponents and (more so) antagonists of action on climate change.
- **People are essentially illiterate on carbon pricing or ‘the carbon tax’** and apart from the high levels of scepticism concerning the political motivations behind ‘the carbon tax’, **the overwhelming majority of people have little understanding of the structure and application of the carbon pricing legislation.**

- As a result of the personal experience for many people over recent years of cost of living increases driven (largely) by rising electricity prices, plus a focus on carbon emissions from energy production as an assumed focus of the carbon tax, top of mind associations with the carbon tax are predominantly concerns about its cost impacts, especially on electricity pricing.
- A point of confusion and concern on carbon pricing is its perceived structure, **whereby the act of reducing emissions for companies or individuals simply averts a penalty, it is not rewarded**. In plain language terms, it appears to be ‘all stick and no carrot’.
- **Many believe the purpose of the carbon tax is to ‘help the environment’, but there is in fact very poor literacy on how it actually achieves this end**. To this end, it is necessary to refocus positioning of the legislation from being a financial (tax) policy to an environmental one achieved through financial mechanisms, including both compensation and investment.
- Opposition to carbon pricing in Australia is also heavily influenced by a perception that ‘big polluting’ countries like China and India are ‘doing nothing’ and ‘don’t care’ about their carbon emissions and due to their relative size reduce the efforts and sacrifices of Australians to virtually naught.
- Some people who support carbon pricing do so only on the basis of ‘we need to start somewhere’, with a hope it will lead to the development of more successful policy approach in the future.

4.3 Responsibility for Action on Climate Change

- When seen from an environmental perspective, there is a strong perception that **‘every little bit helps’** in terms of actions to address climate change. Without leadership from government and business however, there is a concern that individual actions are somewhat futile.
- **There is a belief that coordinated action can be effective**, just as occurred with collective water saving actions during the drought – which worked not just to save and reduce water usage in the short term, but to change attitudes and behaviours in the longer term.
- In terms of responsibility, there is a widespread view that **responsibility for action on climate change befalls individuals, business and governments alike** – they all have a role to play. There is some doubt however that business and governments are taking their responsibility seriously enough or implementing effective action.
- For most people there is heartfelt individual compulsion to take action on climate change or at least actions to mitigate environmental harm. There is an overwhelming sense of the benefit (even if that is a personal benefit) of **‘doing my little bit’**.

- In terms of personal actions already being taken, there is a large focus on energy saving efforts, reduced use of high emissions vehicles such as petrol powered cars and an increased reliance on recycling, re-use and minimizing resource use. **Water saving** also receives significant mentions in actions in response to climate change, which is where **the topic most readily confuses or blends with the broader topic of environmental conservation.**

4.4 Motivational Drivers for Action on Climate Change

- ‘Laddering’ of the motivational drivers behind action on climate change reveal that although **‘caring for the environment’** certainly appears to be a key values driver, it **competes with a host of other drivers** including values such as good health, financial security, consideration of future generations, personal enjoyment and happiness, peace of mind, quality of life, well-being, personal achievement, pride, belonging to a community, love of family, freedom and independence and even faith in God.
- The actions of many people who are driven specifically by a care for the environment are triggered by a desire to reduce or minimize their carbon footprint as their way of doing something for the environment. However, the primary reason for taking action on climate change is often not about climate change or even the environment. **Cost saving is more often the trigger or at least a requisite consequence, with the environmental/climate benefit an added bonus.**
- Cost saving is an incentive consideration for action on climate change, which is to be expected given the high salience of cost of living pressures for ordinary Australians. The stark irony however, is that the Government’s carbon pricing laws contain a perceived cost threat (or disincentive) to many Australians and there is little perceived benefit to warrant or justify the cost.
- Looking ahead, voters are not only doing what they can within their means in terms of actions on climate change, they are prepared to do more. **Direction and leadership on the practical things that people can do at an individual and household level is required.**
- Taking responsibility, making a contribution and ‘doing my share’ or ‘doing my little bit’ are often trigger points for individual action on climate change. This consideration can be part of various values pathways, from the personal achievement of recycling or reducing power use generally, to contributing to a community effort by having a ‘Green initiative’ power review or doing something for the environment by installing solar panels.

- Similarly, whilst many actions with a cost of living component lead to a ‘financial security’ value (especially for people on fixed or low incomes), they can just as readily be driven by affordability or savings considerations around:
 - Quality of life, e.g. more money for luxuries;
 - Personal enjoyment, e.g. more money for family activities;
 - Good health, e.g. able to pay for specialist medical treatment;
 - Future generations, i.e. saving our environment for the future.

- The more collective the effort on action on climate change, the more optimistic people are about the chances of success and the more the values orientation driving action shifts to collective drivers, such as belonging to a community and consideration for future generations. **A sense of national pride in the achievement is also important.**

5 DETAILED FINDINGS

5.1 Attitudes to climate change

Through either written or verbal exercises, group participants were asked to describe their:

- Top of mind associations and understanding of climate change;
- Belief in climate change;
- Best evidence that climate change is occurring, or not.

5.1.1 Top of mind associations with climate change

To ensure that individual responses were not being influenced by other group members, group participants were asked to write down their top of mind associations with the term ‘climate change’ before there had been any discussion on the issue. The following table summarizes those top of mind responses:

Table 1: Top of mind associations with climate change

| Location / Response | Acknowledgment | Negative/Sceptical/Neutral |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Brisbane | Action necessary Happening Change in climate is dramatic, the world needs to address it Critical international issue Warming/ Greenhouse effect Wild weather Risk Polar ice caps | Tax Government needs to work really hard to convince people about climate change Not true, false information True or false, I don't know Natural cycle, happens every 1,000 years, earth is cooling Not the big issue Government is making it out to be as they are using it for getting votes Political |

| Location / Response | Acknowledgment | Negative/Sceptical/Neutral |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Sydney | Volcanoes / Earthquakes Over-population The world becoming warmer Weather / Weather patterns / Seasons change Pollution / Influenced by pollution It's real Rising sea levels Happening now, backed by science | Forgotten issue Worry about increasing costs True or false? |
| Ballarat | Think green Pollution, more extreme weather Pollution Ice caps melting More extreme weather Human influence on climate of the planet Depletion of natural habitats and loss of species Greenhouse gases Earth Carbon Adverse weather conditions | No effect yet, drought ended Taxes Carbon price 60% certain, 40% doubt Scare-mongering Very politicized Doubtful |
| Newcastle | Is happening Seasons changing CO2 levels rising, loss of ozone layer, rising sea levels, loss of habitat and extinction of species Caused by over-use of electricity | Nonsense I'm not convinced Natural cycles Costs |
| Perth | Ice caps Rising sea levels, loss of land Less rain, drought, crops Weather events Ozone | Carbon tax Alarmist crap Rubbish Chaos and a mess – because of Government |

Summarizing from the above table and the ensuing discussions, top of mind association responses to the term ‘climate change’ fall into several discreet category ‘types’, regardless of the acknowledgement, rejection or questioning of climate change:

- Natural events and cycles;
- Human contribution;
- Environmental affects;
- Attitude and political context.

What is very clear from this initial exploration of the issue of climate change is that thinking on the issue is quite disparate and fragmented. These top of mind associations are important to understand as they reveal the swirling array of thoughts people have about the issue. There is confusion between causes and effects from an environmental perspective as well as the political contextualization of the issue through the contemporary ‘carbon tax’ debate – noting and evidenced by the responses in Table 1 there was literally a cocktail of opinions across all locations visited – with a mix of acknowledgment, outright rejection and sceptical questioning in all locations.

“Even if there is a climate change problem, I definitely don’t think the carbon tax is the way to go.”

“I think there is a problem, but the fix should start overseas.”

“A fair bit of it is grandstanding by our Government. We are just a piddley little nation of 20 million people and we shouldn’t be trying to lead the world.”

In summary, the discreet ‘types’ of thinking on climate change are indicated by the following observations and ideas – and noting that this listing is based on the findings of this research project only and not necessarily an exhaustive list of all considerations:

- Natural events and cycles:
 - Volcanoes
 - Earthquakes
 - Long term natural cycles
- Human contribution:
 - Over-population
 - Greenhouse emissions and pollution from energy generation and use, cars, manufacturing and agriculture
- Environmental effects:
 - Rising CO2 levels
 - The world becoming warmer, rising temperatures
 - Changed weather patterns and conditions, including extreme weather events such as droughts and floods
 - Changing seasons
 - The hole in the ozone layer
 - Ice caps melting, rising sea levels, loss of land
 - Loss of habitat and species
 - Impact on farming activities

- Attitude and political context:
 - Support, pro-environmentalism – necessity for action
 - Opposition – disbelief
 - Doubt/confusion
 - Scientific basis to support/opposition
 - Tax and cost implications
 - Role and motivations of Government

In terms of the environmental effects of climate change, there is certainly a fear of getting to a point of no return. This fear is driven not just by concern for the environment itself, but by the impact it will have on people's lives through changed weather and seasonal patterns, health impacts from reduced air quality, impacts on coastal population centres and displacement from rising sea levels and even famine and war from the impact on food production and supply.

"I think the greatest threat for us is rising sea levels. We are a continent and 90% of us are clinging to the coastal edge, so rising sea levels will have a big impact on our population. Other things like hot or cold weather we can adapt to with technology."

"I am concerned climate change will impact water supplies and then farmers will not have the water they need to grow crops, let alone being able to afford the water."

"As temperatures rise we will be tempted to plug in more air conditioners and therefore more energy used, more pollution, the hot it gets and around and around we go. So it will affect our lifestyles. We might have to reduce our expectations and usage for driving and air conditioning."

"The biggest threat of climate change for me is increased living costs – for food, transportation, insurance and energy."

"People will start fighting over limited resources. There will be wars."

5.1.2 Belief in climate change

What the above summary shows is that the top of mind thinking on climate change is dominated not by the causes but by either the environmental outcomes or the political considerations. In terms of causes, natural drivers receive as much focus as human contribution. Discussion reveals that a minority only are entirely convinced by climate change science or their own observations that humans are contributing to climate change.

"I am not convinced by the science of climate change and so I am reserved about the politics of it too. I guess I am just sceptical about Governments in general and them trying to do national or global things to put control in."

"From what I hear on the radio and such, these things are going to take thousands of years. I won't be here so how do I really know if it is true?"

“Climate change is about man-made pollution and carbon dioxide emissions and there is incontrovertible proof of that, for example the poles are melting, sea levels are rising and temperatures are changing across continents. These changes are not happening over centuries, but decades. These are things you can’t deny.”

“There is an amount of climate change that occurs naturally, like as a result of volcanic eruptions. That has always happened, before man was even on the earth. But if we are accelerating it, and population growth is probably the biggest impact, then we need to be conscious of that.”

That many people have to rely on their own observations reveals not just a mistrust and lack of understanding of the available science, but more importantly a failure to effectively communicate the findings of climate change science to the general community. For many people this is indeed a failure to educate rather than unwillingness to be educated.

The most striking demonstration of the fragmentation of the climate change debate is the difficulty ordinary, everyday people have in describing climate change and its causes.

“I don’t understand it.”

“Climate change is the change of the seasons. We are getting hurricanes and storms and cold snaps. When I was a kid, winter was winter and summer was summer.”

“Climate change is natural, being accelerated by humans. It is not just getting hotter, in some parts it is getting colder, so it’s about extremes and more storms. They reckon the sea levels are rising, but I don’t know if that is man-made climate change.”

“I think it’s about a lot of things, sea levels rising, species extinction, etc and of course we have made a contribution.”

When discussion on climate change turns to the contemporary political context, attitudes take a turn for the worse as negative connections to the Government’s so-called ‘carbon tax’ legislation usurp the agenda.

A fractured view of the nature and causes of climate change leads to some uncertainty about climate change itself or at least whether there is anything that mankind can do about it, regardless of the cause. For example, climate change is wholly attributed by some to a natural cycle of warming and cooling by way of a continuing cycle of ice age events followed by warming. As a result, there is scepticism amongst these voters that individual actions can address climate change.

“When you look at history, we’ve had climate change for millions of years. We have had ice ages and warming periods and yet we didn’t have cars a million years ago. Yes, we do have a lot of cars and burn coal, but it makes me wonder how much is just scaremongering and how bad it really is.”

The above sentiment appears to be a minority view only and there is a strong countering perception that ‘every little bit helps’ in terms of actions to address climate change, especially when seen from an environmental perspective. It should be noted that climate change is not currently viewed from an environmental perspective as the debate tends to be focused around the Government’s carbon pricing legislation and the financial rather than environmental impacts of these laws. More on this later.

Just as there is a belief that ‘every little bit helps’, there is a view that effective action on climate change requires better coordination and leadership, to create confidence that the myriad individual actions that are being taken are all adding up to effective collective action. Without this leadership, there is a concern that individual actions are somewhat futile. There is a belief that coordinated action can be effective, just as occurred with collective water saving actions during the drought.

5.1.3 Causes and evidence for climate change

The vagueness and fragmentation of understanding of climate change is demonstrated by participant responses to being asked to write down their ‘definition’ of climate change and a discussion on the causes and ‘evidence’ for climate change. Many people skirt the causal considerations for climate change by talking only to the environmental symptoms, once again indicating that there is lack of awareness and confusion on the level of contribution to climate change of natural cycles versus human activity.

“The pollution from cars and burning coal and everything is burning a hole in the ozone layer that protects the earth.”

“Things are happening now that happened a hundred years ago, so to me that says it is nature’s cycle.”

“I am not absolutely sure of it, I am just going off what I have read.”

Many causal interpretations are based on vague scientific notions or a perceptual response to an individual experience of the changing environment – the most consistent and compelling being an observed ‘change in the seasons’.

“Garden bulbs flower at a certain time of the year. That has changed. The heat causes the bulb to shoot.”

“Summer is not summer any more. You get wet weather and it’s cold. The seasons are different, not like they used to be.”

“It’s about changing weather patterns and they say that is caused by temperatures rising”

“It hasn’t been scientifically proven, but you can feel it, it’s there and it’s worldwide. There are record snow falls in the USA and we haven’t really had a summer this year.”

Other commonly cited evidence for climate change was the melting of glaciers and the polar ice caps, changed weather patterns and conditions resulting in extreme weather events such as droughts and floods and also a belief that the hole in the ozone layer is increasing (although the validity of this last point is often questioned).

“Last year I went to Alaska. The glaciers have retreated a couple of kilometres in a year and they put that down to climate change.”

“Icebergs breaking away in Antarctica are the best evidence for me. We have certainly had icebergs floating around for a while and the Titanic is proof of that, but there is more happening and glaciers are now disappearing quicker.”

“There are more people than a hundred years ago and we are living longer, so we are using more resources and making more pollution. That has to have an effect.”

The counter, and often firm, view is that these seasonal and weather events are part of a continuous cycle of geological time proportions. This is not inconsistent with a belief in man-made climate change however, which many believe is speeding up the process of naturally induced climate change – the question is by what degree and on this point most are unsure. **A key finding is that to focus only on anthropogenic climate change (i.e. at the exclusion of natural causes) is to deny the intuitive perspective and thinking on this issue of most people.**

“This carbon tax all revolves around global warming, but I just don’t know. What caused ice ages a million years ago. There were no humans then, but I think humans are probably accelerating things now by the type of stuff we put in the air.”

Criticisms of the professional proponents of climate change action are that they only focus on the human contribution and that the scientific evidence is too often alarmist in nature and based on ‘untrustworthy’ predictions and modeling.

5.2 Impact of politics and political leaders

Discussion about action on climate change degenerates into farce once politics and politicians enter the fray. There is a deep cynicism about the motivations of all sides of politics on this issue and any sense of environmental consideration is almost completely lost. There is an almost singular focus on the ‘carbon tax’ and the self-interest, short term vote implications for the parties.

5.2.1 Carbon pricing

People are essentially illiterate on carbon pricing or ‘the carbon tax’ as it is known colloquially. Apart from the high levels of scepticism concerning the political motivations behind ‘the carbon tax’, the overwhelming majority of people have little understanding of the structure and application of the legislation. There is at best a vague notion that it applies to ‘big polluting companies’, with many people believing not just that companies will pass their increased costs on but that it is actually a direct tax on individuals for their energy use.

“I am fairly neutral in my opinion on the carbon tax because I don’t really understand what it means.”

“I am not against doing something on climate change, I am just not convinced that a carbon tax is the right way to go.”

“Electricity companies will put their price up and we will pay that plus increased GST, so the Government is double dipping with us.”

“A few of my friends have said they don’t like it, but I think they are like me, they just don’t understand it.”

An aspect of the carbon pricing policy that people do not understand is why it is altogether punitive, with no incentive for taking proactive action. The act of reducing emissions for companies or individuals simply averts a penalty, it is not rewarded. In plain language terms, it appears to be ‘all stick and no carrot’.

On the whole people have very little confidence that the compensation element of the carbon legislation will cover the expected price rises – as a consequence of a lack of faith in Government estimates, fuelled by further doubts that they the Government is in fact telling the truth. There are also concerns that the compensation element will only cover price rises in the first year or two of the legislation and after that people will be exposed to price rises.

“They say they will compensate us but I think that is just political ‘bullshit’. They rob Peter to pay Paul all the time.”

“I don’t know how they think a few hundred dollars to pensioners and people on unemployment benefits will cover the exorbitant cost increases in energy and other bills – and what does it really achieve?”

“It is robbing Peter to pay Paul and I can’t see what it is going to do.”

As a result of the personal experience for many people over recent years of cost of living increases driven (largely) by rising electricity prices, plus a focus on carbon emissions from energy production as an assumed focus of the carbon tax, top of mind associations with the carbon tax are predominantly concerns about its cost impacts, especially on electricity pricing. As a result, there is a very consistent reaction of ‘it is just going to hurt ordinary people like me’.

“When they brought in the GST they said there would be no more taxes. The same with the Medicare Levy, it just goes up and up and up. There are that many little, and big, taxes creeping in it’s just not funny. So what is going to happen here with the carbon tax, who knows what is going to happen and how it will snowball? We just don’t know and you can’t trust them.”

“I am worried about the pensioners, how they are going to afford it. It may be beneficial in the long run, but I am more worried about the people.”

“I certainly don’t think these payments and bonuses work for any sort of scheme, whether it be baby bonuses or solar rebates or whatever. As soon as people get a lump sum of cash they go out and spend it on things in the here and now. It is a big mistake to use that type of incentive. Increase the pension or benefits to allow them to pay for the increases in cost of living, but don’t give people one-off cash bonuses.”

In terms of the purpose of the carbon pricing legislation, there is a significant proportion of people who think it is ‘just another tax’, a perception driven by general cynicism about Governments and in particular of the integrity and financial malaise of the current Government. Many believe the purpose of the carbon tax is to ‘help the environment’, but there is in fact very poor literacy on how it actually achieves this end. As a result, in considerations on whether to keep the carbon pricing legislation or not, reasons for keeping it are often predicated on a ‘hope’ that it ‘might’ make a difference and that it is ‘at least a start’. The unspecific and potential (only) benefits credited to carbon pricing are difficult to defend in the face of what are perceived to be trenchant, politically motivated calls for its repeal.

“It is just to raise revenue. It won’t stop the amount companies will mine, they will just pass it on.”

“There has been nothing definite about what the tax will do; just amorphous claims about reducing pollution and such forth.”

“I don’t know what they intend to do with the money they rap from the tax. If they were going to pipe natural gas or something I would support it, but I think it is a bit of a Government grab fostered by the Greens.”

“I would be OK if I could see the money going to improved infrastructure and better fuels and renewable energy and such forth, but none of that has been explained.”

It is clear that for carbon pricing to be more acceptable to voters, specific environmental benefits need to be espoused. This is not to say that there should not be a focus on the financial aspects of the legislation in terms of compensation, just that it is not sufficient to focus on the compensation elements alone because there is little faith that the compensation will be adequate. More importantly, it is necessary to refocus positioning of the legislation from being a financial (tax) policy to an environmental one achieved through financial mechanisms, including both compensation and investment.

“If I could see something coming back to the community; not compensation but jobs from renewable energy.”

“We might not like it but we will get used to it just like the GST. And hopefully they will put the money into renewable energy. That’s what I hope.”

“It might cause us to diversify here in Newcastle and that would be a good thing, to be less reliant on coal, but I am worried about the job losses it will cause.”

“The tax is a discouragement to environmentally unfriendly companies. I don’t understand the mechanics of it but I am OK with the purpose of it. There are some very negative things being said but that is just typical shock jock stuff because they just like to get people up in arms. As a developed nation we need to do it and we need to think about the repercussions of our actions if we don’t do it, in terms of the effect on future generations. It has just been very poorly explained and poorly sold to the people.”

The above considerations are largely theoretical however at this time. The practical reality is that in the short term the carbon pricing legislation is ‘spoiled’ by the politics of the issue.

In the longer term, raising awareness of the specific environmental benefits of carbon pricing into the public debate may help to bolster the perception that carbon pricing in some form is both inevitable and required, including the transition to an emissions trading scheme. Further, there is also voter doubt that Tony Abbott and the Coalition will in fact repeal the legislation and increasing acceptance of the carbon pricing legislation once it is implemented may help to reduce the political benefit that is gained from this issue. In the short term, the issue appears to be effectively ‘owned’ by the Coalition, but once it has achieved its short term objectives, the situation and opportunities may change.

“I think it is inevitable. Even if they get it wrong in the beginning, someone has to start off, make a move.”

“We are all going to have to put our hands in our pockets at some stage, it is inevitable.”

“The road is probably in the middle somewhere, but how do you know what is the truth when everybody is yelling so loud? There is a lot of scaremongering to make Labor look bad and then they [the Coalition] will probably bring it in or keep it anyway.”

“It might just be Tony Abbott’s way of getting in with the people who have their backs up about it and then when he’s in he might keep it anyway. Once a tax is in, they never take it back – it’s just electioneering. That might sound cynical, but they think we are stupid and we’re not.”

“Politics is all about expediency and Abbott will do what is expedient to get into power. So would Labor if they were in Opposition.”

“We need to prepare now. Major companies need to think about their future energy supplies.”

“It will have already cost a lot of money to change to a carbon tax and it will cost a lot of money to change back.”

“I don’t know if he will repeal it or not. I don’t know what to believe. There hasn’t been a Government yet that sticks to their promises and once they get coin coming into the till they are not going to stop that coin coming in.”

Opposition to carbon pricing in Australia is heavily influenced by a perception that China and India are 'doing nothing' and 'don't care' about their carbon emissions and due to their relative size reduce the efforts and sacrifices of Australians to virtually naught. Raising awareness of the efforts and carbon pricing policies of high carbon emission countries such as China (particularly) and India to reduce their emissions will likely help to reduce criticisms of the tax locally.

"The Government is putting on a carbon tax yet still shipping coal to China and India. That's a contradiction to me. We are not allowed to use it, but we are still selling it, so aren't we still contributing to the greenhouse effect?"

"We are just a drop in the ocean but are going to suffer all the pain and consequences of rising prices and job losses. For what? It's nothing to what India or China or America would do in a day."

"Are China and India imposing a carbon tax? We are just a small nation and what we do doesn't make one iota of a difference whether we impose a carbon tax or not. The world is a big place and most of the pollution comes from China and India, so I don't see why we or the companies here should be copping the tax. I just don't think it is the answer."

Just as voter attitudes to carbon pricing are impacted by consideration of what is happening in other countries, very few people think that Australia can afford to divorce itself from the global context of climate change, i.e. Australia unquestionably plays a role and has a responsibility to act and 'do its share'.

"I don't worry about other countries. I think we should take responsibility for our own actions and as long as we are putting the money into action and see something happening, like renewable energy or something, then I am OK with the tax. Otherwise nothing happens."

Another consideration in respect to the Government's carbon pricing legislation is that there is widespread belief that this is the only thing the Government is doing to address climate change. There is little awareness of funding and support for other initiatives and noting that the basis of support for carbon pricing is often on the proviso that it is 'hopefully' leading to actions to tackle climate change, such as research and development into renewable energy technologies.

"To support a carbon tax, someone needs to convince me that it is really going to make a difference to climatic conditions of the world."

5.2.2 Credibility of sources

People find it difficult to identify any credible authorities on climate change. At best, they name ‘scientists in general’, ‘the CSIRO’ and ‘the Chief Scientist’ but no individual scientists are readily known and identified. There is an almost complete disconnection between the scientific community and the general community, leading to some mistrust of scientists and science.

“If the scientists would just get their act together. A lot of people believe in science, but if the scientists would really, really prove it, and there was no doubt about it, that would make a big difference. Until that happens, nobody knows.”

People have a distinct mistrust of politicians on the issue of climate change and similarly anyone who has a vested interest in the outcome of the debate, including proponents and (more so) antagonists of action on climate change.

“You can read about climate change and the carbon tax in the paper, but how do you know what to believe. Most of them are biased.”

5.3 Action on climate change

This section addresses various aspects of action on climate change, including:

- Responsibility for action on climate change;
- Individual actions on climate change;
- Ideal actions on climate change;

5.3.1 Responsibility for action on climate change

There is a widespread view that responsibility for action on climate change befalls individuals, business and governments alike – they all have a role to play. There is some doubt however that business and governments are taking their responsibility seriously enough or implementing effective action. Reasons cited for why business and/or governments have a responsibility included:

- To provide leadership and direction.
- Because they have a responsibility to do so.
- To inspire, educate and enable others to take action.
- To make a difference to the environment.
- Because they have significant resources and so can have a bigger impact than individuals and households.
- Because they are a major contributor to the problem of climate change.

Interestingly, regardless of whether people think business and governments are acting responsibility on climate change or not, for most it does not reduce or dilute their own, personal responsibility. For most there is an individual compulsion to take action on climate change specifically or at least actions to mitigate environmental harm.

“I think we all should try to do our best to reduce things to a minimum. Responsibility is with everyone, Government, business and individuals”

“What we do today impacts the future, including our children and grandchildren.”

“I think are too many big houses and they are using too much energy unnecessarily.”

“The leadership definitely has to come from the Government. I believe the Government has been following the science, but they need to lead more. I know it can be hard for them when there they are competing with vested interests”

“No-one wants to leave the place worse than what it is, but I don’t know what that is, I am not smart enough, so the Government has to lead.”

Even when prompted with the prospect of catastrophic climate change caused by unavoidable natural events and the inevitable futility of personal actions against the potential magnitude of such events, people hold firm to an individual responsibility to act on climate change. The reasons vary, which we will explore in the following sections, but **there is an overwhelming sense of the benefit of ‘doing my little bit’.**

“Every little bit helps. If everyone does nothing, what are the consequences? You have to start somewhere.”

“It feels a bit helpless at times with China and India not doing much, but it doesn’t stop me trying to do something. It is the right thing to do, to protect our planet. Even my little bit has to do something.”

Questioned on the sensibility of this position, aside from the reason, the justification of it for many was contained in the fact that similar actions had achieved success in the past and that it just boils down to ‘doing what I can do’. The most consistently cited example of previous success was water saving practices during the last drought – which had worked not just to save and reduce water usage in the short term, but had changed attitudes and behaviours in the longer term.

“We cut our water usage drastically in the drought.”

5.3.2 Individual actions on climate change

Participants in all groups were asked to write down the various actions they have taken or things they have done in response to climate change. The responses were varied but largely focused on household and individual actions and are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Individual actions on climate change

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Energy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turn off, unplug lights • Installed solar panels • Switched to energy saving light bulbs • Reduced use of household appliances, e.g. air conditioning, heating, clothes dryer, etc • Replaced electric hot water with solar/heat pump • Changed household appliances to appliances with better energy ratings • Installed energy saving power cut off • Installed house insulation • Reviewed power usage in the home | <p>Recycling, re-use and minimization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycling of household papers, cardboard, cans and bottles • Buy local produce • Grow own vegetables and herbs • Shopping locally • Boycott products with excessive packaging • Not using plastic bags at supermarket • Buying second hand goods • Composting / Worm farm for composting • Swap / barter goods rather than buying new |
| <p>Transport:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Converted car from petrol to LPG • Ride or walk instead of driving • Catch the bus instead of driving • Bought a hybrid car • Ride motorcycle to work rather than driving a car | <p>Environment and water:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Took part in Clean Up Australia Day • Tree planting • Became a vegetarian • Turn off taps • Installed a water tank • Saving water, e.g. brushing teeth, shower • Storm water harvesting • Reduced use of chemicals for house cleaners • Switch to water saving shower heads • Installed dual flush toilets |
| <p>Government, community and workplace:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Had a 'climate smart' appraisal of the house • Use less energy at work • Improved chemical disposal and farming practices • Took part in earth hour | <p>Other actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch documentaries, research and self-education about climate change • Write letters to people in power • Teach children about climate change |

In terms of these personal actions taken, there was a large focus on energy saving efforts, reduced use of high emissions vehicles such as petrol powered cars and an increased reliance on recycling, re-use, minimizing resource use and 'thinking and shopping locally'. It is interesting to note that water saving receives significant mentions in actions in response to climate change, which is where the topic most readily confuses with the broader topic of environmental conservation.

In Table 2 above, the **bolded actions** are those selected by individual participants as the ones that they think have been their most important action on climate change. Asked why that particular action is important to them, a range of responses ensued, including:

- Saving on costs
- Reducing my energy use and reducing waste
- Reducing pollution
- Knowing I am doing my bit
- Improving my health
- Improving my quality of life
- It is the right thing to do
- Being smart about the way we do things
- Saving and protecting the natural environment
- Working towards a sustainable future

The key finding from this discussion was that people's primary reason for taking action on climate change is often not necessarily about addressing climate change or even environmental. **Cost saving is more often the trigger or a requisite consequence of the action, with the environmental/climate benefit an added bonus.** For many people, maintaining good health and quality of life are important, as well as fulfilling an obligation to 'do my little bit'.

What was also evident from this discussion is that people are doing what they can within their means in terms of actions on climate change. Further, they are prepared to do more, but need direction and leadership on the practical things that they can do at an individual and household level.

"The Government needs to take the lead on some national action, then we could all get involved. If it's just left to individuals, a lot will think, 'Why bother?'"

"The little people like us seem to be doing everything and the Government doesn't seem to be trying."

"We could do more, but a not a whole lot more, we are doing everything we can now."

5.3.3 Ideal actions on climate change

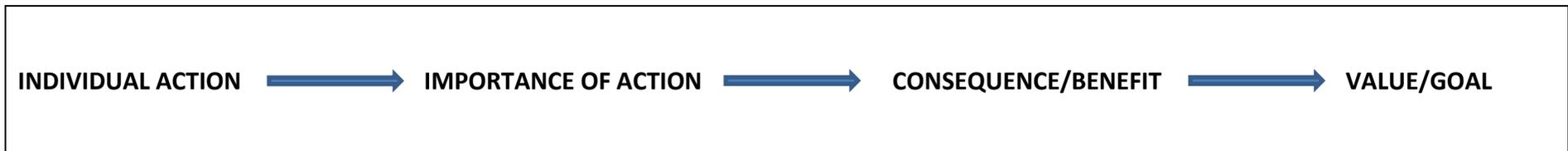
Group participants were asked to describe what actions they would ideally like to take on climate change if time, money and resources were not a problem – almost as if they had a magic wand. Most ideas were merely extensions or larger versions of their individual actions, showing that there is somewhat of a vacuum of ideas and thinking in this area, i.e. a lack of leadership, as indicated above. Suggestions for action included:

- Install solar panels on all new (and existing) homes and buildings
- Incentives for development of large renewable energy projects
- Increase the use of renewable and alternative energy sources, including solar, wind, tidal and geo-thermal
- More research into nuclear power
- Energy from nuclear fusion
- More gas for energy production
- Research cleaner fuels
- Buy back older, less fuel efficient vehicles
- More electric / hybrid cars
- Improve public transport systems and reduce use of cars
- Build high speed, inter-city trains
- More LPG in cars, trucks and buses
- Reduce emissions from factories
- Plant more trees
- More biodegradable, recyclable product packaging
- Better use of water, including installing household water tanks
- Less packaging and more recycling (household waste and water)
- Introduce a container deposit scheme
- Better farming and food production practices
- More research and information on actions to address climate change
- Change our thinking through information and education
- Live a healthy, sustainable lifestyle
- Get government, business and individuals working together
- More flexible work from home arrangements, to reduce commuting

5.4 Thought patterns and driving values behind action on climate change

In the next stage of the qualitative research group participants were asked to self-assess their most important action on climate change (and similarly with their ideal action) and then guided through a written and discussion ‘laddering’ exercise on the reasons for that action and the consequences and benefits of it for them, with a view to identifying the motivational drivers or values orientation behind action on climate change. In some groups an additional exercise was conducted based on selecting from a list of reasons for action on climate change taken from public sources.

From the individual and ideal action exercises, we have constructed the various pathways for the thinking on climate change from individual action to the values orientation, as follows:



This part of the qualitative research applied a ‘means-end’ laddering technique. It enables better communications and engagement based on fresh insights into the various drivers and triggers of action on climate change. An understanding of the various pathways also reveals the basis of current attitudes to climate change, including the politics of it, and suggests alternative pathways for communication and engagement.

It is important to note that this was an exploratory, qualitative research exercise so we are not drawing firm conclusions about the dominant pathways at a population level, which would require further tailored quantitative research. The values orientations in the following pathways do not represent an exhaustive list of all possible values or pathways, simply those identified through this qualitative research program.

5.4.1 Goals and values

What is particularly revealing about the results is that although **'caring for the environment'** certainly appears to be a key values driver of action on climate change, it **competes with a host of other drivers** including values such as good health, financial security, consideration of future generations, personal enjoyment and happiness, peace of mind, quality of life, well-being, personal achievement, pride, belonging to a community, love of family, freedom and independence and even faith in God.

The pathways show that the actions of many people who are driven specifically by a care for the environment are triggered by a desire to reduce or minimize their carbon footprint as their way of doing something for the environment.

Reducing your carbon footprint can also be driven by a desire for environmental sustainability and so connected to consideration for future generations. The idea of doing something or 'doing my little bit' for the environment can also be about people wanting to take responsibility for their actions or to avoid the stress or guilt of doing environmental damage, so the values drivers can then be personal achievement or pride (associated with taking responsibility), peace of mind (less stress/guilt) or quality of life (consumption with less guilt).

Reducing carbon emissions can also be about contributing to community which connects to the values driver of belonging to a community, whilst for some people it is about 'doing the right thing' and has a moral element based upon faith in God.

Good health is another common values driver of action on climate change, but it occurs through various pathways, such as:

- Recycling, so there is less landfill and a less polluted or toxic environment;
- Planting trees, which helps with the carbon cycle and ensuring the air is cleaner to breathe;
- Growing your own food or riding a bike, which is about being healthier; or
- Installing solar panels so as to save money and be able to pay for specialist medical treatment.

For some people, there is satisfaction in taking an action that is achievable and for this they need actions that are inexpensive and easy to do, such as reducing energy use by simply switching off lights, saving water or recycling.

5.4.2 Consequences and benefits

Taking responsibility, making a contribution and ‘doing my share’ or ‘doing my little bit’ are often the key trigger points for individual action on climate change. This consideration can be part of various pathways, from the personal achievement of recycling, installing solar panels or reducing power use generally, to contributing to a community effort by having a ‘Green initiative’ power review or doing something (caring) for the environment by installing solar panels.

A sense of balance, harmony and tranquility is also an important trigger, as is the inverse consideration of reducing stress and guilt, as it helps people to attain peace of mind, well-being, quality of life, enjoyment and happiness.

It is important for some people to minimize their impact on the environment, by using fewer natural resources through actions such as recycling or energy saving. There is often an association to this trigger of saving time and/or money, because it helps to deliver financial security or even just more time with family. Minimization sometimes linked to a desire for order and control, driven by pride or a need to achieve.

5.4.3 Importance of actions

At the more functional, everyday level much climate change action contains a cost saving element (or incentive), which is to be expected given the high salience of cost of living pressures for ordinary Australians. As can be seen from the pathways this relates directly to actions such as energy and transport efficiency actions and recycling. The stark irony however, is that the Government’s carbon pricing laws contain a perceived cost threat (or disincentive) to many Australians, which is at the heart of the Coalition’s successful political campaign to-date against the so-called ‘carbon tax’. Whilst many actions with a cost of living component lead to a ‘financial security’ value (especially for people on fixed or low incomes), they can just as readily be driven by affordability considerations around:

- Quality of life, e.g. more money for luxuries
- Personal enjoyment, e.g. more money for family activities
- Good health, e.g. able to pay for specialist medical treatment

The following tables summarize the key action to values orientations for individual action on climate change.

| INDIVIDUAL ACTION | IMPORTANCE OF ACTION | CONSEQUENCE/BENEFIT | VALUE/GOAL |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Install solar panels | Reduce costs | Able to pay for things I need & want | Quality of life |
| | | Cope better with COL increases | Financial security |
| | Save money | Pay for specialist medical treatment | Good health |
| | Reduce carbon footprint | Taking responsibility | Achievement |
| | Reduces pollution | Doing something for the environment | Care for the environment |
| Solar hot water | Lower carbon footprint | Doing something for the environment | Care for the environment |
| | | Free energy | More money for luxuries |
| | Reduced electricity usage | Personal satisfaction | Care for the environment |
| | Saves money | Buy things I like | Enjoyment |
| | Reduces carbon pollution | Doing my share | Peace of mind |
| Reduce power use | Easy thing for me to do | Can see result in cost savings | Achievement |
| | | Saves money | More money for family activities |
| | Reduces energy use | Personal satisfaction | Care for the environment |
| | Saving environment | Future generations | |
| | Doing my little bit | Pride / Achievement | |
| Green initiative power review | Become 'greener' | Making a contribution | Belonging to a community Achievement |
| Upgrading appliances | Reduced costs | More affordable | Financial security |
| | Fewer dangerous gases | Positive environmental action | Care for the environment |

| INDIVIDUAL ACTION | IMPORTANCE OF ACTION | CONSEQUENCE/BENEFIT | VALUE/GOAL | |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Recycling | Something inexpensive I can do | Contributing / Doing my bit | Achievement | |
| | Less waste | Less trees cut down | Care for the environment | |
| | Uses less packaging | Trees are important in carbon cycle | Future generations | |
| | Purchase less | Save money, can spend more on children | Love of family | |
| | Less landfill | | Less polluted / toxic environment | Good health |
| | | | Use less resources | Care for the environment |
| | Save money | Personal satisfaction | Financial security | |
| | Second life for goods | In harmony with the environment | Peace of mind | |
| | Reduces energy usage and pollution | Doing my little bit | Achievement | |
| Planting trees | Helps carbon cycle | Better air to breathe | Good health | |
| | | Stops oceans rising | Peace of mind | |
| | More plants and animals | Healthy environment | Care for the environment | |
| | Less artificial | Less to maintain | Well-being | |
| | Improves natural habitat | Creates tranquil environment | Peace of mind | |
| Growing own food | Self-sufficiency | Honest, ethical approach | Freedom / Independence | |
| | Less processed foods | Healthier lifestyle | Good health | |
| | | Healthier for family | Love of family | |
| Water recycling | More awareness of resource use | Reduced strain on environment | Achievement | |

| INDIVIDUAL ACTION | IMPORTANCE OF ACTION | CONSEQUENCE/BENEFIT | VALUE/GOAL |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Riding a bike | Improves fitness | Reduces chance of heart attack | Good health |
| | Maintain healthy lifestyle | Live longer | Well-being |
| | | Good role model to children | Pride |
| Improved transport | Reduces transport time | More time with family and friends | Love of family |
| | | More time for self, hobbies | Enjoyment |
| Use public transport | Less pollution | Helping environment | Care for the environment |
| | More convenient | Less stressed | Well-being |
| Buy a hybrid car | Less CO2 emissions | Create sustainable environment | Pride |
| | | Stop warming of atmosphere | Future generations |
| | | | Care for the environment |
| | Reduce carbon footprint | Less guilt / stress | Peace of mind |
| Converted car to gas | Save on fuel | Cost less out of pension | Financial security |
| More fuel efficient cars | Reduces major pollution cause | Can drive without guilt | Quality of life |
| Carbon offset vehicles | Negates effect of pollution | Accountable / Right thing to do | Faith in God |
| Reduced work energy | Reduced carbon footprint | Contributing to solution | Belonging to a community |
| Flexible work hours | More involvement in family | Improve work/life balance | Peace of mind |
| Correct disposal of chemicals | Reduce environmental damage | Enjoy the outdoors | Happiness Care for the environment |
| Clean Up Australia Day' | Streets / parks / waterways cleaner | Feel calm and relaxed | Happiness |

5.5 Prompted reasons for action on climate change

Group participants were asked to read a hand out containing a list of publicly sourced reasons for action on climate change. The purpose of this exercise was to see whether participants would identify any persuasive thinking on the merits for action on climate change over and above what they had already identified themselves through the focus group discussions. In some groups, the participants were 'laddered' for their values orientation on the reason they identified as the most important.

The hand out is included as 'Attachment A: Reasons to act on climate change'.

Compelling reasons to act on climate change identified from the hand out included:

- Point 9: **Australia must act now to prepare for impacts of climate change.** There is a fear that we are not doing enough to act on climate change, which is all the more frustrating when people become aware of the possibilities for action. Acting now by 'doing things that we can do' brings both a sense of achievement and peace of mind that helps to over-ride the growing fear of the potential consequences of inaction.
- Point 10: **Decisions made today have lasting consequences** for our children and future generations. The obvious values driver for this is 'consideration for future generations' but for some it connects current quality of life considerations and to pride or personal achievement out of not wanting to have the guilt or be held responsible for not taking appropriate action.
- Point 16: **The need to encourage society-wide behaviour change to:**
 - Make the cost of transition fairer;
 - To be more confident that change will happen;
 - To ensure that the cost is justified.
- Points 21 and 36: **Australia has boundless renewable energy resources** which need to be unlocked. There are various considerations here in terms of:
 - Reduced reliance on fossil fuels;
 - Reduce carbon output;
 - Building a sustainable energy future;
 - The potential for growth in the renewable energy industry leading to new jobs, technology exports, etc.

Apart from the obvious abundance of Australia's renewable energy resources, the existence of large scale renewable energy projects in other countries **raises the question of: why Australia is not doing the same?** The benefits in terms of cleaner air leading to better health outcomes is readily identified as are the prospects for sustainable energy and environmental outcomes for ourselves and future generations.

Another interesting takeout is that people see unlocking Australia's renewable energy resources as eminently achievable, i.e. unlocking the potential for achievement and pride on a national scale. The possibility of this achievement also unlocks renewed optimism that we can do something smart amongst aspirational, achievement oriented people– who are typically under-whelmed by the Government's response to action on climate change by way of its carbon pricing legislation.

- Point 22: **Growing your own vegetables** or buying from farmers markets to reduce transport emissions, to save money and as fun education for children. This action unlocks a host of motivational drivers, including:
 - Financial security from saving money;
 - Caring for the environment from reduced transport emissions;
 - Enjoyment for self and children;
 - Achievement from growing your own food;
 - Freedom and independence from being self-sufficient;
 - Good health and well-being from the confidence the food you have grown or have sourced locally is healthy and of a high quality.

For some people there is also satisfaction and comfort from growing your own food of getting back to a lifestyle that is simpler, less complicated and reminiscent of 'how things used to be'.