

## Australian attitudes to climate change as captured in the lead up to the 2016 Federal election

June 2016

The Climate Institute pre-election polling was conducted on 2-6 June 2016. It shows that concern about climate change, its impacts and the politics around it have been rising and are high across all party lines. This is particularly the case among the 35 per cent of voters who were uncertain regarding their vote.

It also indicates that Australians overwhelmingly wish to see our country take an international leadership role in tackling climate change. This sentiment has continued to rebound since 2012 and has almost returned to the 2008 peak level (see *Figure 1*).

Australians clearly agree that there is economic opportunity in tackling climate change policies, a view shared by over two thirds of Coalition and 81 per cent of Labor voters.

### Concern about climate change has surged

Concern about climate change is significantly higher than [in 2013](#) at 72 per cent (27 per cent very concerned, 45 per cent fairly concerned and just 7 per cent not concerned at all). In 2013, just 53 per cent were concerned (15 per cent very concerned, 38 per cent fairly concerned). Concern from Coalition, Green and Labor supporters was, respectively: In 2016, 62, 96 and 79 per cent; and in 2013: 41, 84 and 63 per cent (see *Figure 2*). The Coalition jump is notable.

### Uncommitted voters have strongest views

Throughout the polling, responses from uncommitted voters were more strongly aligned with positive action on climate change than those who were 'certain' or 'quite certain' about whom they would vote for. For example 76 per cent of those who were 'not certain at all' were concerned about climate change (30 per cent very concerned and 46 per cent fairly concerned).

### Is climate change occurring and why?

Three quarters of Australians now think climate change is taking place, up from 70 per cent last year, 66 per cent in 2013 and 64 per cent in 2012. This view is held equally across age groups, gender and location (highest at 80 per cent of people in Victoria, 75 per cent in Queensland and lowest in NSW

on 70 per cent). This view is held by Coalition, Green and Labor supporters at 67, 97 and 79 per cent respectively.

Further, when those who think climate change is taking place consider the main cause of climate change, 91 per cent think humans are a cause: 50 per cent attribute climate change to a mixture of human causes and natural cycles, while 41 per cent think human activity is the main cause.

### Leadership, action and the economy

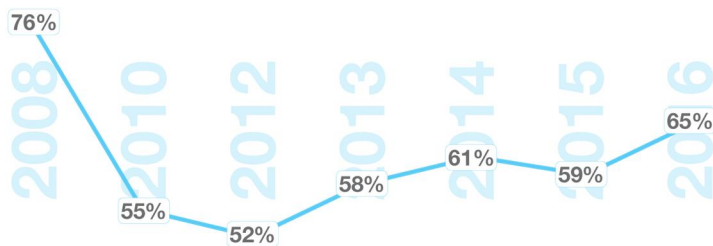
Two thirds (65 per cent) of Australians think that Australia should be a world leader in finding solutions to climate change. This is up from 59 per cent in 2015 and has been on an upward trajectory from a low of 52 per cent in 2012, just before the start of the carbon pricing mechanism. In 2008, the figure was 76 per cent. Uncommitted voters again are more likely to agree with 67 per cent support (see *Figure 1*).

More than three quarters of Australians (76 per cent) think ignoring climate change is not an answer for our country – up from 69 per cent last year. This sentiment is strongest among millennials (ages 18-34), 80 per cent of whom hold this view. Only 8 per cent of Australians think we should do nothing.

At the same time, 74 per cent of Australians think that tackling climate change will create opportunities for new jobs and investment, up from 71 per cent both last year and in 2013, and from 62 per cent in 2012. This view is held across the political spectrum: Coalition supporters 67 per cent, Greens 87 per cent and Labor 81 per cent.

60 per cent of Australians think that delaying, or implementing half measures, on climate action will increase the likelihood of future shocks to jobs, electricity prices and energy supplies. And more than two thirds (68 per cent) think that extreme weather events will cause cost of living increases – a view held strongly across party lines (60 per cent of Coalition supporters, Greens 79 per cent, Labor 76 per cent and uncommitted 71 per cent).

**Figure 1: Australians who want their nation to be a world leader in finding solutions to climate change.**



### Political solutions in Australia

60 per cent of Australians think the Turnbull government should take climate change more seriously, a slight “improvement” over the 63 per cent who thought this about the Abbott government a year ago but more than the 57 per cent in 2014. Half (49 per cent) of Coalition supporters think this, along with 83 and 75 per cent of green and Labor supporters.

Only 17 per cent of Australians think the Coalition has an effective plan to tackle climate change. This view is held across gender, age groups and location, as well as party lines – Coalition supporters 31 per cent, Greens 6 per cent and Labor 13 per cent, uncommitted on 5 per cent.

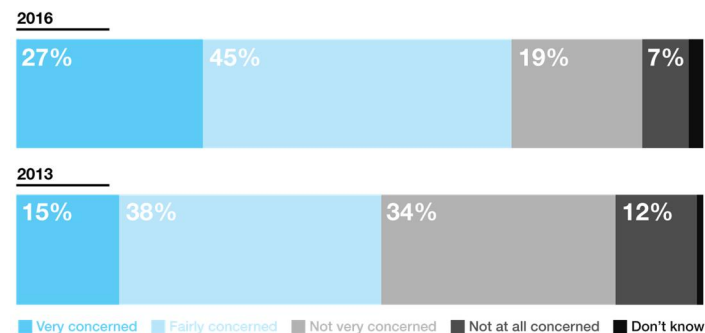
The situation is not much different for Labor with only 20 per cent of Australians thinking the party have an effective plan, again consistently reflected across gender, age group and location, but slightly less so among party supporters – Coalition supporters 9 per cent, Greens 25 per cent, Labor 40 per cent and uncommitted 9 per cent.

### Labor policy and the “carbon tax”

Much is made of the “carbon tax” as a negative factor in voter decision-making. Our [2013 election exit polling](#) revealed that just 3 per cent of voters saw repealing the carbon tax as the most important reason voters supported the Coalition. In a head to head question, 40 per cent supported emissions reduction versus 28 per cent supporting repeal. In an indicator of diluted effectiveness of the ongoing scare campaign around the carbon tax, only 28 per cent of Australians say they would not vote for Labor because they would re-implement the carbon tax – down from 36 per cent in 2015. Older Australians (38 per cent) and Coalition supporters (48 per cent) are more likely to have this view as opposed to 9, 14 and 17 per cent of Green, Labor and uncommitted voters.

While still significant, our results show that only 42 per cent of Australians hold the view that Labor’s carbon policies will only result in increased electricity prices while doing little about pollution – down from 47 per cent in 2015. Two thirds (64 per cent) of Coalition voters hold this view – substantially higher than the 26 per cent of Greens, 29 per cent of Labor supporters and just 32 per cent of uncommitted voters.

**Figure 2: Australians concern about climate change.**



### Should Australia wait for other countries before it takes stronger action?

Only 23 per cent of Australians think we should wait for other countries before we strengthen our post-2020 emissions reduction target, with 55 per cent disagreeing with the notion. 40 per cent Coalition supporters disagree (37 per cent agree), along with 85 per cent of Green, 61 per cent Labor and 63 per cent of uncommitted voters. 18 per cent were neutral and just 13 per cent agree.

63 per cent of Western Australians don’t think we should wait compared to 60 per cent of Victorians, 55 per cent in Queensland and 47 per cent in NSW.

Only 24 per cent of Australians think we should wait for China and the USA to act on climate change before we do, with 57 per cent disagreeing. 64 per cent of uncommitted voters disagree with this statement. In 2013, 49 per cent disagreed and 28 per cent agreed.

### Political spread of sample

Respondents to this survey identified themselves as 38 per cent supporting the Coalition (35 per cent Liberal, 3 per cent Nationals), 32 per cent Labor, 9 per cent Green, 6 per cent another party and 16 per cent said they did not know. This primary vote break-up was reflective of a federal poll conducted on the same weekend.

Despite their stated voting alignment, 35 per cent of people surveyed said they were uncertain who they would vote for in the election on 2 July 2016. Among these uncommitted voters 27 per cent were current Coalition supporters, 24 per cent were Labor supporters and 12 per cent current Greens supporters.

### Methodology

Research underpinning this Factsheet was conducted online by Galaxy Research from 2-6 June with 1,100 Australians nationally, aged 18 years and over. The dataset was weighted and projected to the population based on the latest ABS population estimates.

For all of The Climate Institute’s election content visit: [www.climateinstitute.org.au/news/election-2016.html](http://www.climateinstitute.org.au/news/election-2016.html)