Views on carbon pricing

*Climate of the Nation 2013* provides a detailed look at how Australians view carbon pricing. Many of the national poll questions this year were benchmarked from mid-2012, but further questions were added to tease out some of the nuances that underpin Australians’ attitudes towards carbon pricing and could well play a role in the policy’s future.

**The economic impact of carbon pricing has not been as detrimental as expected.**

+ In 2012, 61% of Australians agreed (27% strongly) that carbon pricing would have a negative impact on the Australian economy. A year later, this has dropped to 45% and importantly, only 15% strongly agree.

+ In 2012, 61% of Australians disagreed (30% strongly) that Government compensation from the revenue raised from carbon pricing means that most households will not suffer as a result of carbon pricing. This has dropped to 42% disagreement in 2013, with only 18% in strong disagreement.

+ Fewer households, but still a majority, believe they are worse off than they thought they would be before the carbon price came into effect. In 2012, 65% of households thought they would be worse off, whereas in 2013 53% say they are worse off since the carbon price was introduced. Importantly, in 2012 36% said they would be much worse off, which has dropped to 24% in 2013.

+ The number of people who think that they are better off under carbon pricing has not changed. Only 8% of Australians agree they are better off under carbon pricing this year, while 30% (up 10 points since 2012) believe things are about the same.

**More Australians prefer to keep some form of carbon pricing (46%) or trading scheme than abolish it altogether (36%).**

+ 20% of those who want to keep some form of carbon pricing want to see it fixed up so that more money is invested into renewable energy.

+ 14% think leave carbon pricing unchanged and give it more time to work and 12% think change it to an emissions trading scheme or similar to what is being introduced and in place in many other countries rather than a tax. (See graphic below.)

**Significantly more Australians agree (42%) than disagree (26%) that carbon pricing is better than taking no action, consistent with results from 2012. But they remain unconvinced about the policy because they don’t understand it.**

+ While the proportion of Australians who strongly disagree with the statement I support the carbon pricing laws has dropped since 2012 (from 30% to 20%), support for carbon pricing remains low at 28%.
+ Fully 64% of Australians agree that they would be more supportive of carbon pricing if they could see more direct benefits. This means that people continued to have only a limited understanding of the legislation and are not aware that revenue raised from carbon pricing is invested in renewable energy.

+ A quarter (24%) of Australians are uncertain and more disagree (31%) than agree (20%) that Australia’s carbon pricing is consistent with current international action. This was prior to the decision to bring EU-linked emissions trading forward by a year.

+ Only 36% agree carbon pricing is driving investment in renewable energy.

+ Only 34% agree that carbon pricing will have a positive impact on the environment.

Support for carbon pricing is soft but climbs when people understand that all revenue is invested in renewable energy and it significantly reduces carbon emissions.

+ This year a majority (51%) agree that they support carbon pricing if all the money raised goes to support low and middle income households and Australian businesses and renewable investment energy. This is up from 47% in 2012.

+ 57% agree (and only 16% disagree) they support carbon pricing if a significant proportion of the money raised is invested in renewable energy.

+ 54% agree they support carbon pricing if it will significantly reduce Australia’s carbon emissions.

+ 53% agree they would be more supportive of carbon pricing if they knew that other countries such as China, India and the United States were taking more action.

While support for carbon pricing is still soft, there is no desire for repeal of the laws. In fact 43% of Australians think that now that the laws are in, they should be given a few years to work.

+ Only about a third (37%) of Australians believe that the Coalition should repeal carbon pricing if it is elected to government at the next Federal election. That is down from 48% last year.

+ Asked if they think that the Coalition will repeal carbon pricing if elected to government at the next Federal election, more men agree than women, at 42% compared to 30%.

+ Just 24% agree that if we get rid of carbon pricing, electricity prices will go back to where they were before carbon pricing was introduced (6% strongly agree, 18% agree).

There is no mandate for a double dissolution if the Coalition fails to get the carbon laws abolished, with more people against a double dissolution election (43%) than for one (34%).

+ The majority (46%) of Australians agree that neither Labor nor the Coalition’s position on carbon pricing and climate change make a different to their vote, and there is no significant difference between those Australians who say that Labor or the Coalition’s positions on climate change makes a difference to their vote.

+ For Coalition voters, the top concerns about Labor are economic mismanagement, its perceived broken lies and promises generally and Julia Gillard’s ‘carbon tax lie’. The carbon tax itself was further down a list of issues including waste of taxpayers’ money and dislike of policies generally.

+ Australians are more likely to believe that Labor has an effective plan for tackling climate change (26%) than the Coalition (19%).

+ However, Australians are ambivalent attitudes to the plans of both of the major political parties; most neither agree nor disagree that either party has an effective plan, or are uncertain.

This year’s results are based on a nationally representative online survey conducted by JWS Research between June 1-7, 2013 among 1,009 Australians aged 18+. The maximum margin of error on a sample of 1,009 interviews is +/- 3.1% at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error will be larger for sub-samples. Where possible we have compared results to the 2012 quantitative research conducted by Ipsos, involving a nationally representative online survey of 1,131 Australians aged 18+ conducted between May 23-30, 2012. Caution is advised in relation to some of the comparisons made between 2012 and 2013 results due to the category ‘Don’t know’ not being available as an option for some questions in 2012.