

The Climate Institute

A black and white close-up photograph of a dinosaur's head, likely a Tyrannosaurus Rex. The image shows the dinosaur's face in detail, with its textured, scaly skin, large eyes, and a wide, open mouth revealing sharp, pointed teeth. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the scales and the intensity of the eyes.

Climate of the Nation 2014
Australian attitudes on climate change:
Are Australians climate dinosaurs?

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Help us take on the dinosaurs in business and politics
because if they win, we all lose.
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This report takes the pulse of the nation on climate change, its impacts and solutions in mid 2014. It compares benchmarked data from similar work in 2012 and 2013.

The report is based on nationally-representative quantitative analysis.

The lead author for this report is Kristina Stefanova, Communications Director of The Climate Institute, with contributions from John Connor, CEO, and Tim O'Halloran, consultant, relying on data from JWS Research.

Some of the imagery in this report has been photographed by Michael Hall, Creative Fellow at The Climate Institute. Dinosaur illustrations by Christer Eriksson.

Climate of the Nation 2014 and associated video content can be accessed at www.climateinstitute.org.au.

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. Please contact The Climate Institute with any questions or for further clarification.

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Aim + Approach

Who

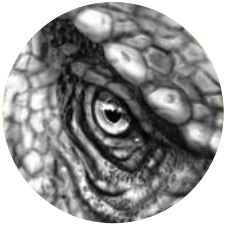
The Climate Institute engaged JWS Research to undertake the quantitative research that underpins *Climate of the Nation 2014*. We are particularly grateful to Jessica Lai and John Scales for their efforts.

The Institute would like to thank staff members Garrett Stringer and Corey Watts for filming the vox pop videos associated with this report, as well as assistants Amelia Anthony, Aaron Davis and Terry Everley. Those videos can be viewed on the Institute's website.

How

The quantitative research was carried out between 16-20 May, through an online survey of 1,145 Australians. Respondents were drawn from the I-view online panel. The data collected was then weighted according to the most recent Census data for location, gender and age.

Are Australians climate dinosaurs?



WHILE CLIMATE DINOSAURS IN POLITICS AND BUSINESS ROAR ACROSS OUR LANDSCAPE, THE MAJORITY OF AUSTRALIANS ARE MOVING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, BACKING LEADERSHIP ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS SOLUTIONS.

FOREWORD

Australians are no dinosaurs when it comes to climate change and its solutions. There has always been majority support for Australian leadership in finding solutions to climate change. This held true even though attitudes took a battering during the long political battle from July 2007 when John Howard backed an emissions trading scheme through 2012 when the laws enabling such a scheme began.

Even at the 2012 low point in community attitudes, 52 per cent wanted Australia to be a leader in finding solutions to climate change. *Climate of the Nation 2014* now shows a strong rebound of almost 10 percentage points.

Attitudes in 2007 had been forged by years of drought and a growing chorus of international and business voices calling for change. Public attitudes and concern peaked in late 2007, with what was described by commentators as the world's first climate changed election. Concern dropped after that election at least in part because people thought they had voted in a government that was going to promptly deal with the issue.

In reality what followed were delays in action, the unfolding of a global financial crisis, the breaking of our drought, the shattering of domestic bi-partisan support for laws that price and limit carbon pollution, and the disappointments of the Copenhagen international climate talks.

Throughout all of this, indicators such as support for Australian leadership on climate change fell. They bottomed out during the toxic political battles, debate about lies and broken promises, and scare campaigns about price impacts that shrouded the introduction of the carbon laws in July 2012.

Then, in last year's *Climate of the Nation*, we detected a shift in mood as the scare campaigns confronted the reality of the laws in practice – a reality not as scary as had been touted. We saw the emergence of the issue from behind what was seen as “the carbon tax lie”.

The return of Kevin Rudd to the Prime Ministership and his rhetoric around axing the carbon tax, even though a fast track to a trading scheme, was damaging. Mostly his comments validated the scare campaigns.

Now Australians are seeing through those scares, and for the first time, only a minority think they are worse off under the carbon laws.

There is now a growing acceptance that climate change is occurring and an increased understanding that impacts are already hitting Australia. In addition, more than two-thirds of Australians see economic opportunities for new clean energy jobs and investment in tackling climate change.

Climate of the Nation 2014 captures a lingering confusion around the solutions to climate change that are on offer, but also a declining opposition to carbon pricing. Lack of understanding still shrouds the policy as well as the Abbott Government's proposed alternative. Importantly, more people now support carbon pricing than “Direct Action”, particularly in the absence of information about that plan. Ultimately, there is deep cynicism about politicians and the climate plans of both major parties.

Support for renewable energy like wind and solar has stayed remarkably resilient. This is the first *Climate of the Nation* since the fragmenting of what had been solid bipartisan support for renewable energy at the federal level. There have been increasing attacks on renewable energy by state and now federal politicians but also energy companies as their fossil fuel based business models lose market share to clean energy technologies.

This poll was taken just a week after the Treasurer described some wind farms as “utterly offensive”, yet shows barely a blip in support for wind and solar energy. Over three quarters of respondents support planning measures to encourage renewable energy, such as wind farms. And the key focus for attack, the Renewable Energy Target, is resoundingly supported with 60 per cent wanting it above 20 per cent of energy by 2020.

So while climate dinosaurs in politics and business roar across our landscape, the majority of Australians are moving in the opposite direction, backing leadership on climate change and its solutions. This is not to say climate change or climate action is now a tier one vote changer by itself, as it was in 2007. But it is to say that attitudes are evolving and are risky to ignore.

It's OK to like dinosaurs, but it's dangerous to be one. Most Australians are shrewder.

John Connor, CEO
The Climate Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2007, The Climate Institute has produced the *Climate of the Nation* report taking the Australian public's pulse on climate change, its impacts and solutions. The research has shown the ebb and flow of opinions as the nation has weathered the physical impacts of climate change (droughts, floods, fires) and the fallout of an ongoing and fierce political debate.

This year's research, conducted in May, once again benchmarks views on key issues and compares the results with research from mid 2012 and mid 2013.

Past research highlights that 2012, just as the carbon laws began, was a low point but attitudes have been rebounding across a range of indicators since then.

Climate Science and Impacts

Climate of the Nation 2014 finds that a much stronger majority of Australians accept that climate change is occurring: 70 per cent today, up 6 points from 2012. Only 13 per cent disagree, a drop of 4 per cent. Most of those who agree that climate change is occurring say that this is at least partly caused by humans (84 per cent). More than a third now think that humans are the main cause of climate change, up 6 per cent from 2012. Just 14 per cent of those who accept that climate change is occurring attribute this mainly to natural cycles, though this is up 3 per cent from 2012 and 2013.

Importantly, almost all of those who accept that climate change is occurring – 89 per cent - perceive that Australia is feeling the impacts now. Some 39 per cent think that Australia is already experiencing “a lot” of impacts, up 4 points from 2013.

Many Australians are concerned that a range of potentially wide-reaching consequences, economic and environmental, may affect the way we live. Key among various concerns are the impact of climate change on food security and about increasing cost of living costs stemming from extreme weather events.

Responsibility and Performance

Australians believe that the federal government shoulders the greatest responsibility for leading a response to climate change and should take the challenge more seriously. But they don't hold much hope that either side of politics has an effective plan to tackle climate change, particularly the current government.

In fact, Australians rate the performance of the federal government today significantly lower than a year ago.

Trust is particularly low for the Prime Minister, with only 20 per cent agreeing that they trust Tony Abbott when he says he is concerned about addressing climate change. This is in stark contrast to the 53 per cent who disagree, including 37 per cent who strongly disagree.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten fares only slightly better: 31 per cent say that they trust Bill Shorten when he says he is concerned about climate change, but 32 per cent disagree, including 18 per cent who strongly disagree.

Leadership

Australians, particularly women, increasingly want the nation to be a leader in climate change solutions (61 per cent). While not up at the levels seen in 2008, when 76 per cent held this view, the numbers are on the rebound. Last year marked the first time support for leadership was up since those highs.

This year's continued growth in support is backed by other polling, such as that done by the Lowy Institute in February, which found strong desire for leadership.

In keeping with these sentiments, 46 per cent of Australians now believe the emissions reduction target of 5 per cent by 2020 is too low (up 14 points since 2012). Only 8 per cent think it's too high (down from 17 per cent in 2012).

A majority (56 per cent) agree that Australia should participate in a new international agreement like the Kyoto Protocol to reduce global emissions.

An increasing proportion don't want to wait for other major emitters like the United States and China to act before Australia does; and more see a role for the nation in helping developing countries reduce their emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Solutions – Carbon Pricing

Almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of Australians agree that ignoring climate change is simply not an answer, as it increases the risk of the situation getting worse.

Climate of the Nation 2014 finds that for the first time, more Australians support the carbon pricing laws than oppose them. Over a third (34 per cent) support the laws, which is up 6 points from 2012. Opposition is down 22 points from 2012 to 30 per cent.

Improvement in support appears to be mostly driven by a realisation that the policy has not been detrimental to the economy or to households' bottom line.

Almost half of Australians (47 per cent) think that carbon pricing is a better solution than taking no action, up 5 points from 2013 and 8 points from 2012. Almost as many (44 per cent) say that carbon pricing should be given a chance to work for at least a few years.

More Australians prefer to keep it over replacing it with the government's proposed “Direct Action” policy (26 per cent compared to 20 per cent) but a majority couldn't decide between the two options. Few see “Direct Action” as a credible policy.

This polling confirms previous research which found that the government really has no mandate to repeal carbon pricing. It follows an exit poll on Election Day, which found that the election was not a “referendum on the carbon tax”, with the issue relegated below many others.

Today only a third of Australians (34 per cent) support repeal, down 3 points from mid-2013 and 14 points

from 2012. Disagreement with the proposition that carbon pricing should be repealed is at 27 per cent, virtually unchanged since 2012.

Solutions – Renewable Energy

While Australians remain confused about the function and benefits of the current carbon pricing laws and are unsure of the proposed replacement policies, their support for renewable energy remains remarkably resilient.

Solar, wind and hydro have topped the charts as ideal energy options for three years now. Coal, nuclear and gas continue to be least supported.

Despite the fragmenting of previously bipartisan support for renewable energy and growing attacks from fossil fuel-based energy utilities, a substantial majority of Australians (76 per cent) agree that “state governments should be putting in place incentives for more renewable energy such as wind farms.” Only 10 per cent disagree.

The major target of attacks on renewables has been the Renewable Energy Target (RET), yet despite this, more Australians not only back the policy but believe it should be more ambitious.

Support for renewables is strong even when the policy is put in context, including the fact that opponents see it as a subsidy that drives up energy bills.

Some 29 per cent of Australians want to see the RET increased to 30 per cent or above, 31 per cent agree to keep the RET as is at 20-30 per cent and 11 per cent would like to see the target set at exactly 20 per cent. Only 4 per cent wanted a decrease in the RET, while 5 per cent want it scrapped altogether.

Key Findings

70%

of Australians think that climate is occurring, up 6 points from 2012

89%

of those who believe climate change is occurring also agree that Australia is feeling the impacts now

61%

want the nation to be a leader in climate solutions, up 9 points from 2012 and the highest since 2010

47%

now think that carbon pricing is better than taking no action, up 8 points from 2012

76%

believe the government should be providing incentives for and making it easier for renewable companies, such as wind, to get projects off the ground

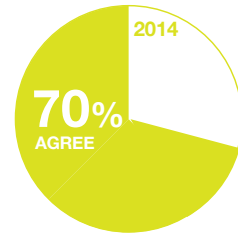
71%

of Australians want the Renewable Energy Target to be at least 20%, with 60% wanting it to be higher, and only 11% who want exactly 20%



Attitudes

"I ACCEPT THAT CLIMATE CHANGE IS OCCURRING"



Research into Australian attitudes about climate change and its solutions highlights that 2012 – when the carbon laws were introduced and the political debate was most toxic – was a low point and that attitudes have been rebounding across a range of indicators since then.

In May 2014, a much stronger majority of Australians (70 per cent) accept that climate change is occurring, up 6 points from 2012. Only 13 per cent disagree, a drop of 4 per cent.

Most of those who agree that climate change is occurring say that this is at least partly caused by humans (84 per cent). More than a third now think that humans are the main cause of climate change, up 6 per cent from 2012. Just 14 per cent of those who accept that climate change is occurring attribute this mainly to natural cycles, though this is up 3 per cent from 2012 and 2013.

Importantly, almost all of those who accept that climate change is occurring – 89 per cent - perceive that Australia is feeling the impacts now. Some 39 per cent think that Australia is already experiencing “a lot” of impacts, up 4 points from 2013.

More Australians than ever recorded by *Climate of the Nation* research now say that they trust the science of climate change. A majority of 51 per cent now hold this view, up 5 points from 2012. The attitude is most prominent among women (55 per cent) and younger people (61 per cent), while men and older Australians remain more sceptical (47 per cent and 41 per cent respectively).

City dwellers are slightly more likely (53 per cent) to agree that they trust the science that suggests the climate is changing due to human activities compared to those living in regional or rural areas (48 per cent).

Fewer Australians, but still a majority (54 per cent, down from 65 per cent in 2012) agree to finding too many conflicting opinions for the public to be sure about claims made around climate change. Older Australians are most likely (62 per cent) to agree that there are too many conflicting opinions for the public to be sure about claims made around climate change, while only about half of Australians under 55 share this view.

For the first time since the question was first asked in 2012, more disagree that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated than agree. Today 41 per cent disagree that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated, while 36 per cent still agree with the statement.

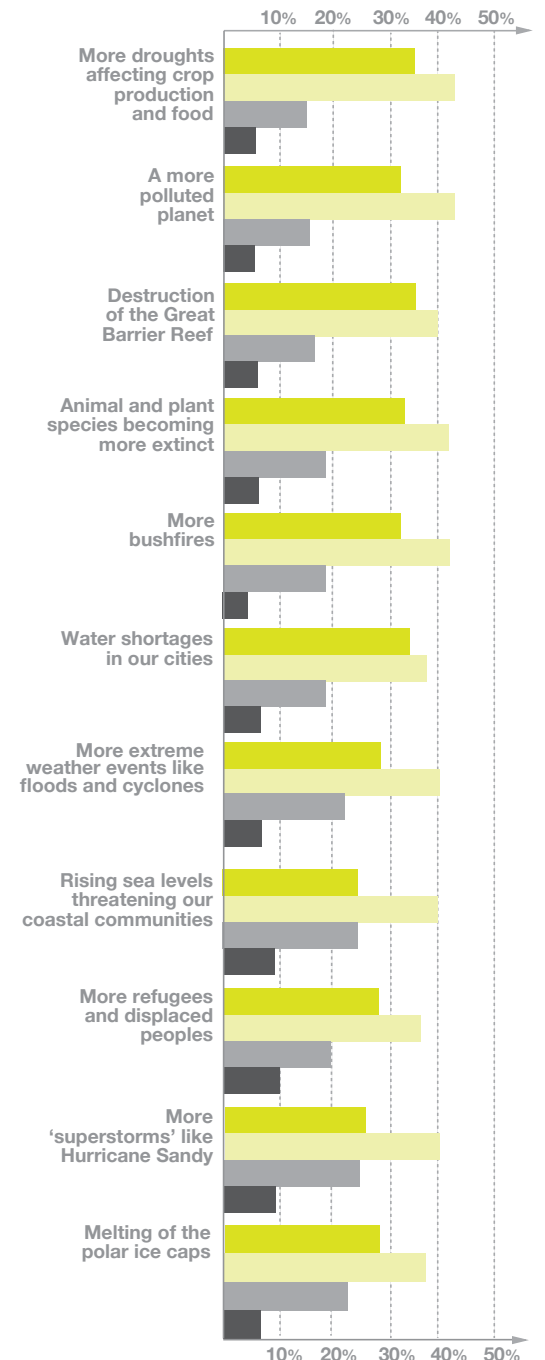
This is an important shift since 2012, when 42 per cent agreed that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated and 33 per cent disagreed. Older Australians are the only demographic where more see the seriousness of climate change as exaggerated.

Concerns

FIGURE 1 : KEY CONCERNS

% of respondents who are this concerned

Very concerned
Fairly concerned
Not very concerned
Not at all concerned



Australians are sensitive to the impacts of climate change that link extreme weather with threats to economic and personal security. Key among these concerns are the impact of climate change on food security and increases in the cost of living stemming from extreme weather events (see Figure 1).

Two-thirds of Australians (65 per cent) think that further extreme weather resulting from climate change could lead to increases in cost of living, and about as many (63 per cent) believe that further extreme weather will cause broader economic impacts.

Overall concern about impacts have been at a relatively steady and high level since 2012 but there has been intensification of concerns regarding water shortages, heatwaves and food security from floods and droughts. Each of these has seen the proportion that is very concerned increase by at least 5 per cent.

Climate of the Nation 2014 finds that women are particularly concerned about the impact of climate change (60 per cent compared to 47 per cent of men) and are more likely to agree that climate change poses a serious threat to our way of life over coming decades (66 per cent vs 51 per cent of men).

Female sensitivity to the threat translates to most issues, from higher frequency of extreme weather events to a more polluted Australia.

These concern findings are reinforced by the recent Lowy Institute poll¹, which this year found the proportion of Australians identifying the issue as "serious and pressing" requiring steps "even if it involves significant costs" back at 2009 levels.

Responsibility

Australians think that it is primarily the role of federal government (56 per cent) and global alliances and groups such as the United Nations (43 per cent) to lead the way in addressing climate change. Just 8 per cent believe the federal government, or business for that matter, should take no action on climate change.

But while the government is seen as the lead actor, approval of its performance is significantly lower than a year ago, at net differential of -18, from -1 in 2013. Some 57 per cent think that the Abbott government should take climate change more seriously.

State, territory and local governments, as well as business and industry, are also seen as having responsibility ahead of individuals and local communities, although most think individuals and communities should be contributing. (See Figure 2 for how Australians see the responsibility and performance of various groups.)

Reflecting widespread cynicism about political institutions, Australians don't hold much hope that either side has an effective climate plan, with 26 per cent thinking the ALP does compared to just 19 per cent believing that the Coalition does. These numbers are unmoved since last year.

Trust in the Prime Minister is particularly low, with only 20 per cent agreeing that they trust Tony Abbott when he says he is concerned about addressing climate change (in contrast to 53 per cent who disagree, including 37 per cent who strongly disagree). This is a net negative trust rating of -33.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten is also in net negative territory, but at just -1. Nearly equal thirds agree (31 per cent) that they trust Bill Shorten when he says he is concerned about climate change than disagree (32 per cent, including 18 per cent who strongly disagree).

Both parties support 2020 emission reduction targets of 5 to 25 per cent below 2000 levels. But almost half of Australians - 46 per cent - now believe that the emissions reduction target of 5 per cent by 2020 which the current government is pursuing is too low (up 14 points since 2012). Only 8 per cent think it's too high (down from 17 per cent in 2012).

Significantly, 43 per cent agree that the government should increase the target to 19 per cent, as recommended by the independent Climate Change Authority².

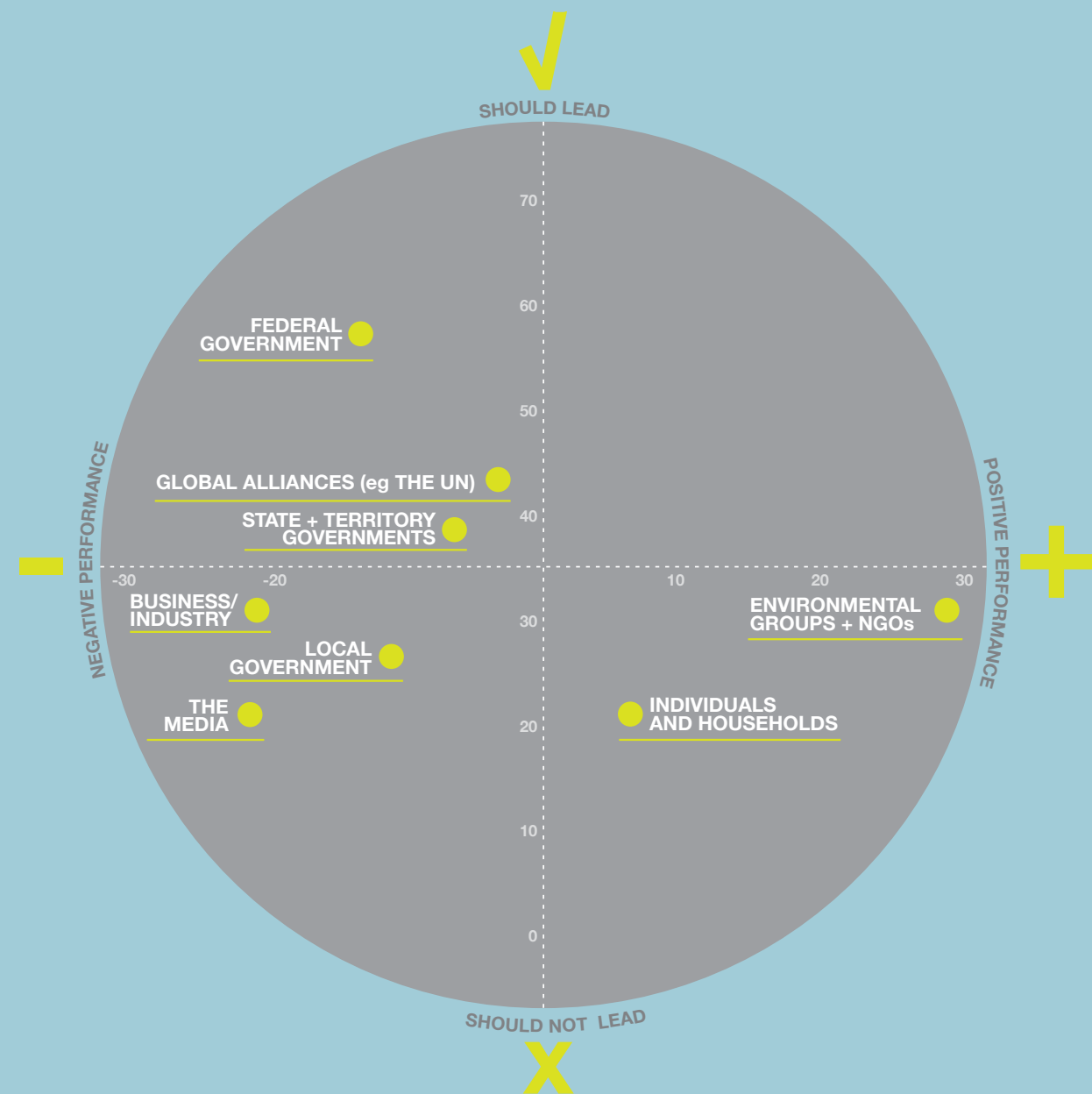


FIGURE 2
VIEWS ON WHO SHOULD LEAD ON ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND HOW THEY ARE PERFORMING

AUSTRALIANS DON'T HOLD MUCH HOPE THAT EITHER SIDE OF POLITICS HAS AN EFFECTIVE CLIMATE PLAN, WITH 26 PER CENT THINKING THE ALP DOES COMPARED TO JUST 19 PER CENT BELIEVING THAT THE COALITION DOES. THESE RESULTS ARE THE SAME AS LAST YEAR.



Leadership

56% OF AUSTRALIANS WANT TO SEE AUSTRALIA PARTICIPATE IN A NEW INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT LIKE THE KYOTO PROTOCOL TO REDUCE GLOBAL EMISSIONS

Australians, particularly women and younger people, increasingly want the nation to be a leader in climate solutions (61 per cent). This is the highest level of support since the highs of 2008³ and the second consecutive year the number has risen.

This year's rise to 61 per cent in *Climate of the Nation* polling is also reflected in Lowy Institute polling from February, which found 63 per cent agreeing that Australia should play a leadership role with just 27 per cent agreeing we should wait for international consensus.

A majority (56 per cent) want to see Australia participate in a new international agreement like the Kyoto Protocol to reduce global emissions.

An increasing proportion disagree that Australians shouldn't act on climate change until other major emitters like the United States and China do (55 per cent up, 6 points from 49 per cent in 2013). Almost half, 45 per cent, now agree that Australia should be amongst those leading the world in putting a price on carbon. This is up 5 points from 2013 and 9 points from 2012.

A majority, 60 per cent, believe that Australia can be influential in encouraging other countries to take action on climate change, up 1 point from 2013. Just 17 per cent disagree.

More than half (54 per cent) agree that Australia needs to help developing countries decrease their carbon emissions and adapt for the impacts of climate change, up 5 points from 2013 (21 per cent disagree, 19 per cent say neither and 7 per cent are unsure).

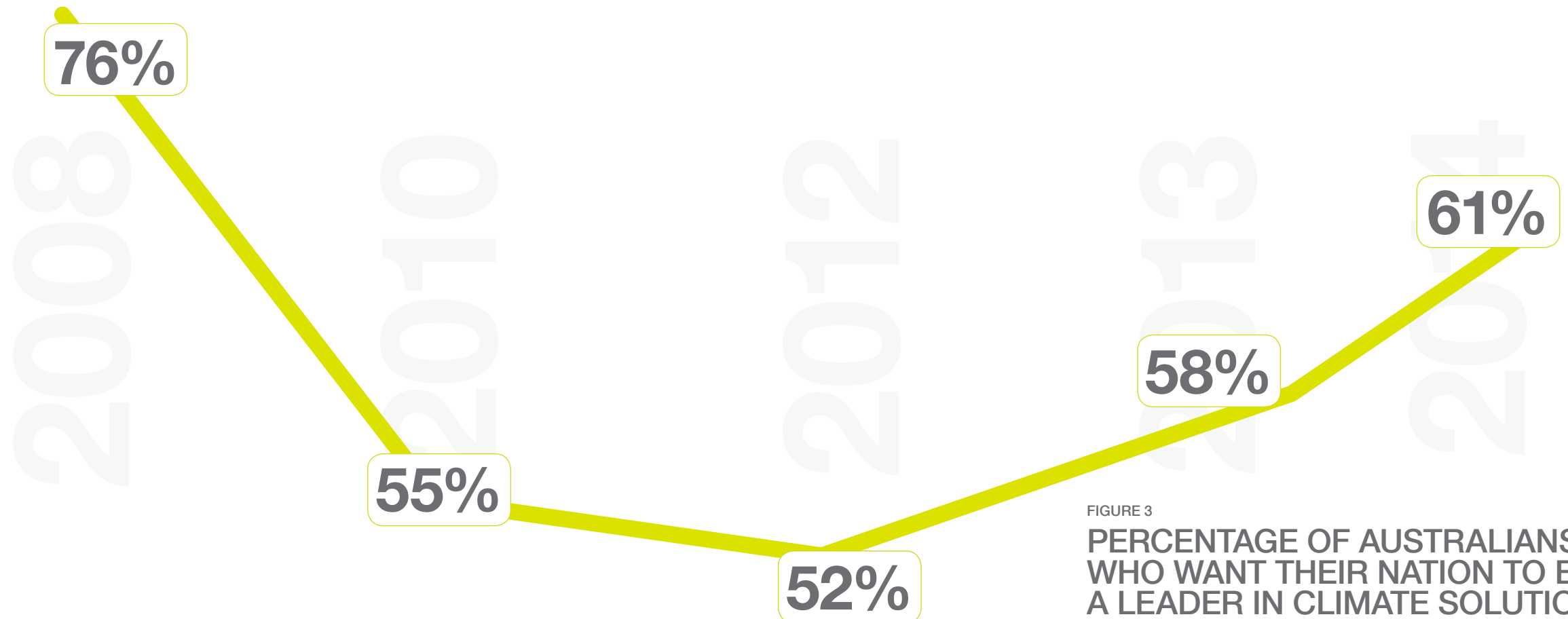


FIGURE 3
PERCENTAGE OF AUSTRALIANS WHO WANT THEIR NATION TO BE A LEADER IN CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Solutions

CARBON PRICING

While almost two-thirds (64 per cent) agree that ignoring climate change is simply not an answer, as it increases the risk of the situation getting worse, Australians are still to be convinced of the solutions on offer.

Yet for the first time, more Australians support the carbon pricing laws than oppose them. Over a third (34 per cent) support the laws, which is up 6 points from 2012. Opposition is down 22 points from 2012 to 30 per cent.

As in last year's poll, support for the laws is a majority, 51 per cent, when it is explained that all the money raised goes to support households, businesses and renewable energy investment.

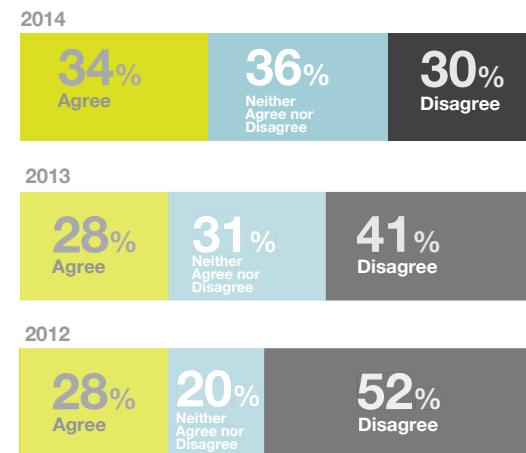
Support for carbon pricing has improved over the last two years, mostly driven by a realisation that the policy has not been as detrimental to the economy or to household finances as had been feared.

For the first time only a minority, 41 per cent, believe they are "worse off under the carbon pricing laws", down from the almost two-thirds who thought they would be worse off in 2012 before the laws started. Australians who believe that carbon pricing is having a negative impact on the economy is 20 points lower than the 61 per cent who held this view in 2012, before the laws came into effect.

What appears to hold back more support for carbon pricing is a sense that Australia is not experiencing any benefits from the policy. Contrary to the evidence of the laws working⁴ as intended, only 34 per cent agree that carbon pricing is helping reduce emissions and 37 per cent agree it is increasing investment in renewable energy.

However, almost half of Australians (47 per cent) now think that carbon pricing is better than taking no action. This is up 5 points from 2013 and 8 points from 2012. Almost as many (44 per cent) say that carbon pricing should be given a chance to work for at least a few years.

"I SUPPORT THE CARBON PRICING LAWS"



"I AM PERSONALLY WORSE OFF UNDER THE CARBON PRICING LAWS"

FIGURE 4
VIEWS ON THE CARBON PRICING LAWS
AND THEIR IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLDS

ONLY 22% SEE "DIRECT ACTION" AS A CREDIBLE POLICY THAT CAN ACHIEVE AT LEAST A 5% REDUCTION IN EMISSIONS BY 2020. MEN ARE SLIGHTLY MORE POSITIVE ABOUT THE POLICY THAN WOMEN, AT 26% VS 17%

DIRECT ACTION

While not fully convinced of the current carbon laws' effectiveness, more Australians prefer to keep it over replacing it with the government's proposed "Direct Action" policy (26 per cent compared to 20 per cent), but a majority chose neither.

Only 22 per cent see "Direct Action" as a credible policy that can achieve at least a 5 per cent reduction in emissions by 2020. Men are slightly more positive about the policy than women, at 26 per cent vs 17 per cent.

A majority (62 per cent) don't think that the government's "Direct Action" policy should use taxpayer money to fund big polluters to reduce their carbon emissions. Only 8 per cent disagree, while 18 per cent say neither and 11 per cent are unsure. Older Australians are most strongly of this opinion (75 per cent compared to 50 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds and 61 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds).

Australians are unconvinced that the potential repeal of carbon pricing will see electricity prices return to lower levels. Just 25 per cent agree with that proposition while 40 per cent disagree.

No referendum for repeal

This research reaffirms that attempts by some to characterise the 2014 election as a “referendum on the carbon tax” have little substance.

Election Day exit polling⁵ found that climate change and the “carbon tax” were the lowest priority issues for voters, with only 5 per cent and 3 per cent selecting them as priority issues, respectively. These issues were eclipsed completely by concerns about the economy (31 per cent) and cost of living (15 per cent).

The Coalition had a policy commitment to repeal the carbon tax but has also committed to reduce carbon emissions by 5 to 25 per cent by 2020. The latter promise to consider more than just 5 per cent reductions was repeated by then Opposition Leader Tony Abbott in the first 2013 election debate. The exit poll found that 40 per cent of voters rated the emissions reduction target as the more important promise, with just 28 per cent prioritising repeal.

Although the election was not a referendum on repeal of the carbon laws, the Coalition is justified in putting its policy to Parliament. Votes on this are expected once the new Senate convenes in July. The other major parties have backed keeping carbon pricing.

Should Parliament support repeal and what do Australians think about all of this now?

Numerous polls have been conducted to test Australians’ attitudes towards carbon pricing and possible repeal of the policy. The results vary, depending largely on the language that is used and response options on offer.

Climate of the Nation 2014 used language about “carbon pricing” when asking about repeal and gave four response options: support, oppose, can’t say, or neither. The poll, conducted in May, found that 34 per cent agree with repeal, 27 per cent do not want repeal, and a larger group - 38 per cent – are on the fence and said neither (22 per cent) or don’t know (16 per cent). Compared to previous *Climate of the Nation* polls, the number of those wanting repeal is down 3 points from 2013, and 14 points from 2012.

Other research also shows that Australians are split pretty evenly on their views. Nielsen⁶ in May and Morgan⁷ in June conducted polls asking about repeal of “the carbon tax” and presented three response options: support, oppose, or can’t say. Nielsen found 49 per cent support repeal and 46 per cent oppose it. Morgan had even more lineball numbers, with 47 per cent supporting repeal, and 46 per cent opposing it. Interestingly, Morgan’s numbers on supporting repeal were down 4 points compared to a similar poll the group conducted just after the election, while those opposing repeal was up 8 percentage points.

What’s missing from this picture?

If repeal of the carbon laws does not occur in coming months, the legislation naturally evolves to an emissions trading scheme (ETS) on 1 July 2015. Australian views on an ETS have not been recently tested, as most polls focused on carbon pricing or “the carbon tax.” But if earlier polls are any indication, support for the existing legislation would be much greater if Australians were reminded that the near future evolution of the carbon laws is an ETS. A Nielsen poll from 2010⁸ found 60 per cent support for this approach.



Renewables

FIGURE 5
MOST PREFERRED
ENERGY SOURCE

1. Solar	82%
2. Wind	64%
3. Hydro (Dams)	48%
4. Gas	28%
5. Geothermal	22%
6. Tidal/Wave	21%
7. Nuclear	20%
8. Coal	15%

While Australians remain confused about the carbon pricing laws and are unsure of the proposed replacement policies, over two-thirds agree that tackling climate change creates new opportunities in renewable energy.

Despite the fragmenting of previously bipartisan support for renewable energy and growing attacks from fossil fuel-based energy utilities, support for renewable energy remains remarkably resilient. Solar, wind and hydro have topped the charts as ideal energy options for three years now. Coal, nuclear and gas continue to be least supported (see Figure 5, which highlights the top three choices).

Perhaps even more remarkably, given direct planning law changes to the contrary and Treasurer Hockey's comments that he finds wind farms "utterly offensive", a substantial majority of Australians (76 per cent) agree "state governments should be putting in place incentives for more renewable energy such as wind farms." Only 10 per cent disagree.

This view is particularly strong among women, regional and rural Australians, and Queenslanders.

- 82 per cent of women agree that state governments should be putting in place incentives for more renewable energy, such as wind farms, compared to 69 per cent of men.
- 79 per cent of regional residents hold this view vs 74 per cent of metropolitan residents).
- Queenslanders are most in agreement at 78 per cent vs 70 per cent of New South Wales residents and 71 per cent of Victorians.

Some government figures and energy utilities have launched attacks on the Renewable Energy Target (RET). Despite these attacks, most Australians not only back the policy but believe it should be stronger.

In the poll it was explained that the RET aims to produce at least 41,000 GWh of electricity from renewables and depending on factors such as energy demand could represent between 20 and 30 per cent of total electricity. It was further explained that opponents of the scheme say the RET is a subsidy that drives up electricity bills, while supporters say that it has helped create jobs and has tripled Australia's wind and solar energy since 2009.

Even with these caveats, 60 per cent of Australians agree that they want the RET to achieve more than 20 per cent renewable electricity by 2020. Some 29 per cent of those surveyed support a RET of 30 per cent or above and 31 per cent support a RET of 20-30 per cent. Only 11 per cent want a target set at exactly 20 per cent. Desire to lower the RET was at 4 per cent, while 5 per cent want it gone altogether and the rest are unsure.

Queenslanders are the most ambitious in wanting to increase the RET to 30 per cent or above (29 per cent vs 24 per cent of New South Wales residents and 26 per cent of Victorians).

71%

of Australians want the Renewable Energy Target to be at least 20 per cent, with 60 per cent wanting it to be higher, and only 11 per cent who want exactly 20 per cent



Demographics

YOUNGER / OLDER

Younger Australians are most likely to agree that Australia is experiencing the impact of climate change. Among those who think that climate change is occurring, 92 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds and 91 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds believe we are experiencing the impact, compared to 83 per cent of 55+ year olds.

Younger people are most likely to think that humans are the main cause of climate change. Among those who think climate change is occurring, 42 per cent hold this view, compared to 36 per cent among 35 to 54 year olds and only 26 per cent among 55+ year olds.

69 per cent of younger and 68 per cent of middle aged people worry about the cost of living impacts of extreme weather events, compared to 58 per cent of older Australians.

Younger and middle aged people are most likely to think that the Abbott government should take climate change more seriously (62 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds, 60 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds, compared to 51 per cent of 55+ year olds) and to believe Governments need to do more to address climate change (both 61 per cent compared to 50 per cent of older people).

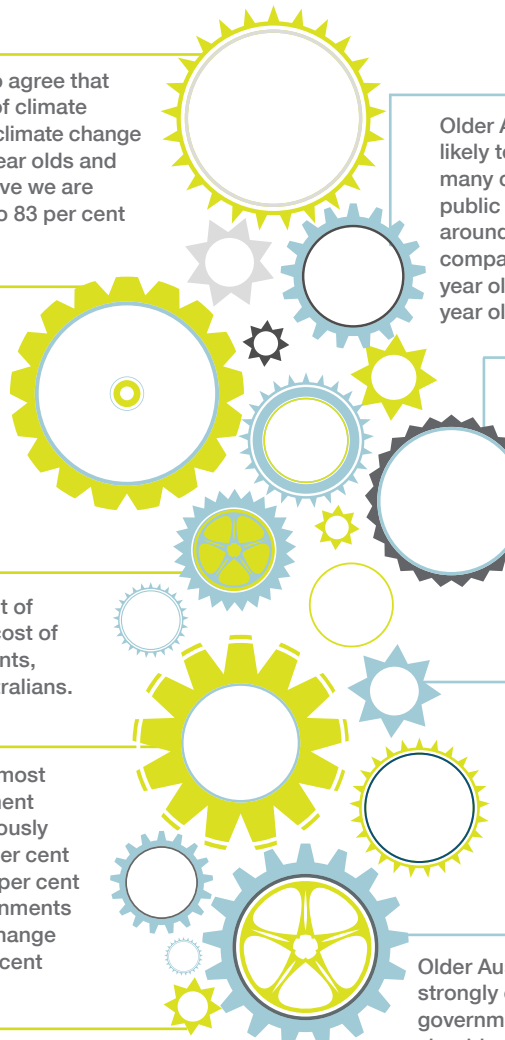
46 per cent of older Australians think that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated, compared to 31 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds and 30 per cent among middle aged Australians.

Older Australians are also most likely to agree that there are too many conflicting opinions for the public to be sure about claims made around climate change – 62 per cent compared to 49 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds and 52 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds.

Older Australians have concerns about climate change and its potential to increase the number of displaced people and refugees. Some 66 per cent worry about this, alongside 67 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds and in comparison to 61 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds.

27 per cent of older Australians also trust Tony Abbott when he says he is concerned about addressing climate change, compared to 18 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds and 16 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds.

Older Australians are also most strongly of the opinion that the government's "Direct Action" policy should not use taxpayer money to fund big polluters to reduce their carbon emissions (75 per cent compared to 50 per cent of 18 to 34 year olds and 61 per cent of 35 to 54 year olds).



HE SAYS / SHE SAYS

Women are more likely (72 per cent) than men (68 per cent) to agree that climate change is occurring and among those who hold that view, women are also more likely to think we are experiencing the impacts of climate change in Australia (92 per cent compared to 85 per cent of men).

Men are significantly more likely to agree that the seriousness of climate change is exaggerated (42 per cent compared to 29 per cent of women).

Women assign all groups, from government to industry and NGOs, a higher level of responsibility for leading climate change action than men. Men are more likely to rate the performance of all groups on their climate change action as poor.

More women than men agree that Australia should be a world leader in finding solutions to climate change (64 per cent compared to 58 per cent of men) and that Australia can be influential in encouraging other countries to tackle climate change (66 per cent compared to 54 per cent of men).

Women are significantly more likely than men to think that the Abbott government should take climate change more seriously (61 per cent compared to 54 per cent of men).



URBAN / RURAL

City dwellers are slightly more likely to think climate change is occurring (73 per cent) than people living in regional or rural areas (66 per cent) and also slightly more likely to agree that further extreme weather events as a result of climate change will cause economic impacts for Australia (65 per cent compared to 59 per cent of people living in regional or rural areas).

City dwellers are more likely to think that carbon pricing is helping to reduce Australia's carbon emissions (36 per cent compared to 30 per cent in regional and rural areas).

Regional and rural Australians are more likely to think that climate change is due to a mixture of human causes and natural cycles (55 per cent compared to 46 per cent of metropolitan residents among those who think climate change is occurring).

Regional residents are more likely to agree that state governments should be putting in place incentives for more renewable energy, such as wind farms (79 per cent compared to 74 per cent of metropolitan residents).

Australians in regional and rural areas are also slightly more likely to think that the Federal government should be taking a leading role in action on climate change (59 per cent compared to 54 per cent of metropolitan residents).

STATE OF MIND

VIEWS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

68 per cent of NSW residents think that climate change is occurring.

70 per cent think that state governments should be putting in place incentives for more renewable energy, such as wind farms.

76 per cent rate solar as their most preferred energy source and 60 per cent rate wind in their top three ideal energy sources.

Most likely to agree that carbon pricing is better than the government's "Direct Action" (29 per cent compared to 21 per cent of Queenslanders and 24 per cent of Victorians).

VIEWS IN VICTORIA

70 per cent of Victorians think that climate change is occurring.

71 per cent think that state governments should be putting in place incentives for more renewable energy, such as wind farms.

81 per cent rate solar as their most preferred energy source and 63 per cent rate wind in their top three ideal energy sources.

Victorians are the most concerned that climate change will cause a more polluted Australia (74% compared to 64 per cent of NSW and 71 per cent of QLD residents). They are also most concerned about the potential of more bushfires (77 per cent compared to 69 per cent of NSW and QLD residents).

VIEWS IN QUEENSLAND

70 per cent of Queenslanders think that climate change is occurring.

78 per cent agree that state governments should be putting in place incentives for more renewable energy, such as wind farms.

Most likely to agree that further extreme weather events as a result of climate change will cause cost of living rises in Australia, such as increased food prices and higher insurance premiums (67 per cent compared to 59 per cent of NSW residents and 62 per cent of Victorians).

Vox

In late May, about 40 people were asked at various central Sydney locations for their views on Australia's current position on climate change, and thoughts around what clean energy jobs might look like in the future.

Videos documenting these expressed views in full can be accessed at: www.climateinstitute.org.au

Respondents were also asked "What portion of our energy should we get from renewable sources by 2020?" The average percentage from the 37 people was 51.5 per cent. Here are images of some of the responses.

WHAT PORTION OF OUR ENERGY SHOULD WE GET FROM RENEWABLE SOURCES BY 2020?



Notes

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If you are interested in supporting The Climate Institute, go to www.climateinstitute.org.au/support

