

Ipsos  
**Climate Change  
Report**



*Get The Scoop*

2017

GAME CHANGERS



This report provides the findings of the annual climate change research conducted in Australia by Ipsos Social Research Institute. As of 2017 we have over a decade worth of data about Australians' views on climate change and other environmental issues. Each year, we ask a nationally representative sample of more than 1,000 Australians to tell us their thoughts and opinions about key climate change issues.



MEGA-TONNES CO2 EQUIVALENT

612

2005

550

YEAR TO MARCH 2017

441

TARGET: 28%  
REDUCTION ON 2005

The National Energy Guarantee (NEG) is a plan for delivering affordable and reliable electricity in Australia.

THERE ARE TWO  
COMPONENTS TO  
THE NEG:

### RELIABILITY GUARANTEE

FOCUSED ON PROVIDING A RELIABLE SUPPLY OF ELECTRICITY TO HOUSEHOLDS AND BUSINESSES

- POWER COMPANIES ARE REQUIRED TO MAKE SURE A PERCENTAGE OF ELECTRICITY COMES FROM DISPATCHABLE SOURCES
- DISPATCHABLE ENERGY = 'READY TO USE' ENERGY SOURCES SUCH AS COAL, GAS, PUMPED HYDRO AND BATTERIES. THESE SOURCES OF ELECTRICITY CAN BE RAMPED UP AND DOWN AT SHORT NOTICE TO MEET DEMAND AND PREVENT BLACKOUTS.

### EMISSIONS GUARANTEE

FOCUSED ON REDUCING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

- THROUGH THE PARIS AGREEMENT, AUSTRALIA HAS COMMITTED TO REDUCE EMISSIONS TO 26–28 PERCENT OF 2005 LEVELS BY 2030. WE STILL NEED TO FULFIL THESE EVEN THOUGH IT IS LIKELY INCENTIVES FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY WILL BE PHASED OUT
- RETAILERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ENSURING THE ENERGY THEY PROVIDE CONTRIBUTES TO MEETING OUR INTERNATIONAL EMISSIONS OBLIGATIONS

# Context

The Paris Climate Agreement, signed in 2014, has an objective to keep global average temperatures from rising more than 2°C on pre-industrial temperatures. This year saw President Trump making good on his promise to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement. This leaves China, the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter, as the main player left capable of making the globally significant changes needed to limit the impacts of climate change. Like Australia, China faces a big undertaking to transition its domestic energy mix away from a reliance on coal.

Closer to home the Federal Government decided to pursue a National Energy Guarantee (NEG), having decided not to adopt the Finkel Review's recommendation of a Clean Energy Target. A NEG will mean that energy retailers will need to source a minimum level of electricity from dispatchable sources. These are sources which can be adjusted to meet short-term demand such as coal and gas, batteries or pumped hydro.

In November of this year, world leaders gathered in Bonn for the 23rd conference for signatories to the UN Convention on Climate Change (COP23). Where the Paris talks were about establishing commitment to taking action on climate change, the Bonn talks were focused on working out the finer points on that action. Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop were in attendance and announced \$300 million spending on climate change and resilience initiatives with our Pacific Islands neighbours.

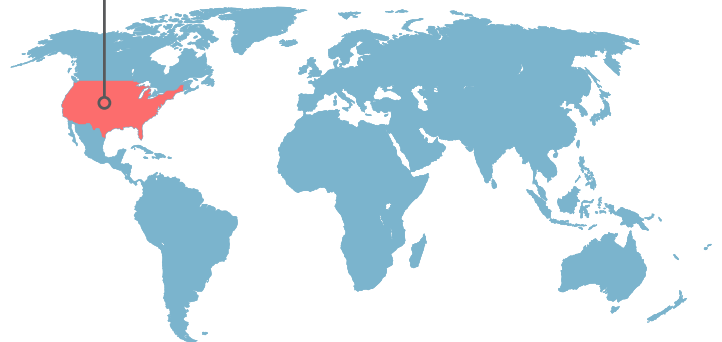
2016 got the unwelcome honour of being the warmest year on record and 2017 – without the added effect of an El Niño event that 2016 experienced – had the second-hottest first six calendar months in recorded history.

Here we present our most recent pulse check on Australians' thoughts and opinions about climate change in 2017.

**President Trump has withdrawn from the UN Paris agreement of keeping global temperatures from rising more than 2°C.**



The USA is now one of the few countries not signed on the Paris Agreement.



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

<https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/news/reporting-state-climate-2016>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2017/jul/31/2017-is-so-far-the-second-hottest-year-on-record-thanks-to-global-warming>





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

**Figure 1. Top issues for action 2017, over time**

**Source:** Ipsos Climate Change Survey 2017

**Base:** All respondents

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

# Priorities of environmental action

Once again, renewable energy is the top environmental issue Australians would act on if they were in charge of decision-making. More than half (56%) identify renewable energy as an issue they would choose to address. The majority of Australians have identified renewable energy as an issue for action every year since surveying began in 2007.

Compared with 2016, there has been no movement in the top 6 issues of importance. Water and river health (49%) came in at number two. This is its highest rating for action since 2012 (when it was 52%).

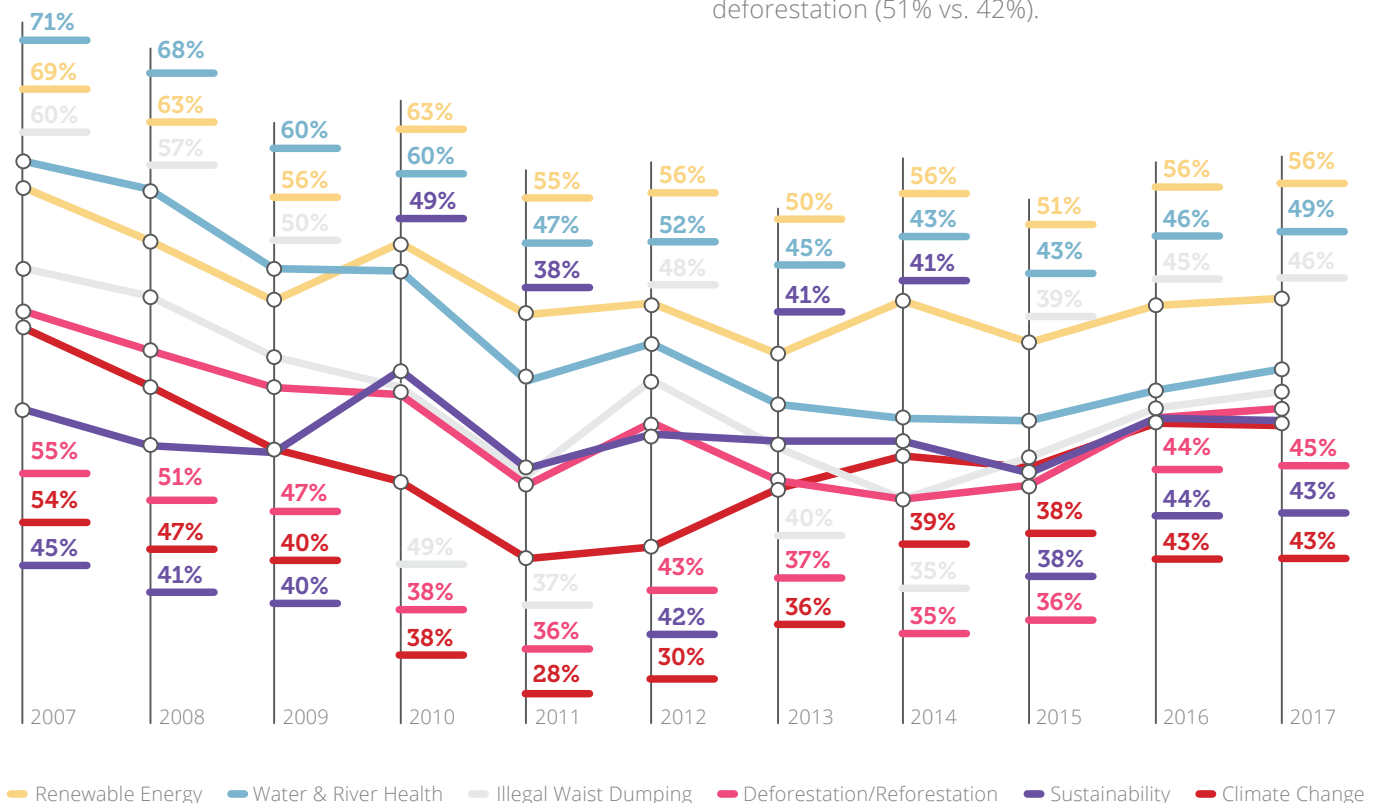
In third place in 2017 is illegal waste dumping (46%), followed by deforestation (45%), sustainability and climate change (both 43%).

## 2/5 Australians

### IDENTIFY RENEWABLE ENERGY ISSUE FOR ACTION

In 2016 we noted that climate change had hit its highest rating since 2008 (when 47% believed it to be a top priority for action), and it retains that sixth place with more than two in five Australians once again identifying it as an issue for action.

Australians in regional areas are more likely to identify renewable energy as an issue for action compared with their counterparts in capital cities (62% 'rest of Australia' vs. 53% capital city residents). The same pattern is observed for water and river health (58% vs. 44%) and deforestation (51% vs. 42%).





Human activity vs. natural processes as causes  
of climate change?



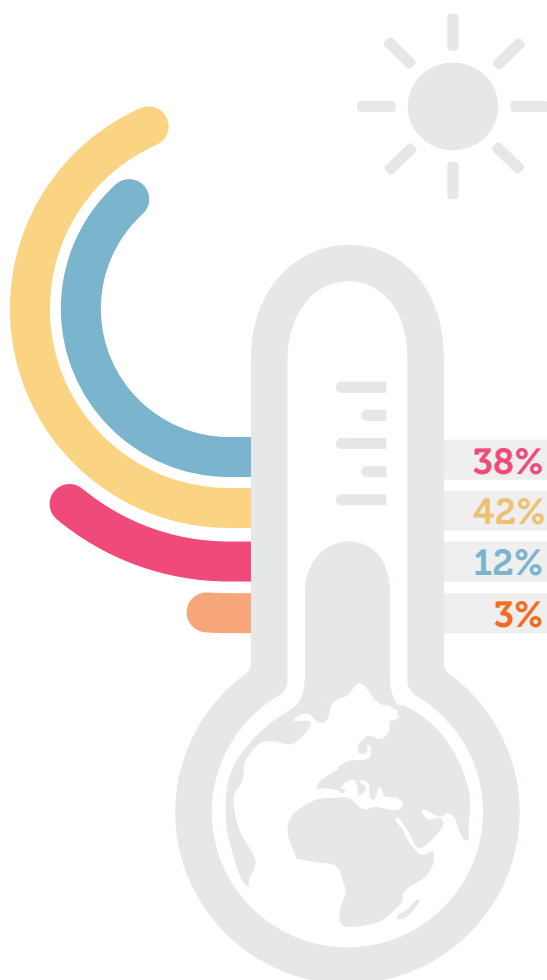
# The role of human activity in climate change

The past few years have seen a growing consensus in the political sphere that climate change is caused by human-driven processes. In the face of this change, Australians' views of the causes of climate change have moved little in the past decade. This stasis has continued in 2017.

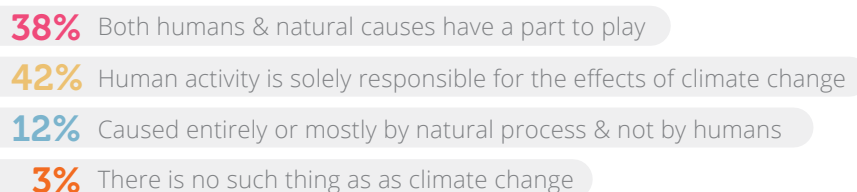
Only 3% of Australians think there is no such thing as climate change. Around one-in-ten (12%) believe climate change is caused entirely or mostly by natural processes. Two-in-five (42%) believe that human activity is mainly or entirely responsible for climate change and 38% believe that climate change is caused partly by humans and partly by natural processes.

Half of Australians aged under 50 years of age believe that climate change is mostly or entirely caused by human activity (50%) compared with one-third of those aged 50 and above (31%).

Voting intention, like age, is linked to public opinion on the role of human activity in climate change. Liberal voters and One Nation voters are less likely to think that climate change was mostly or entirely caused by human activity (34% and 25% respectively). Whereas, Labor voters and Greens voters are more likely to identify human activity as mostly or entirely causing climate change (50% and 69% respectively). There are no differences by geography, but those with a university degree are also more likely to say human activities are entirely or mainly responsible (51%).



**Australians' views of the causes of climate change have moved little in the past decade.**

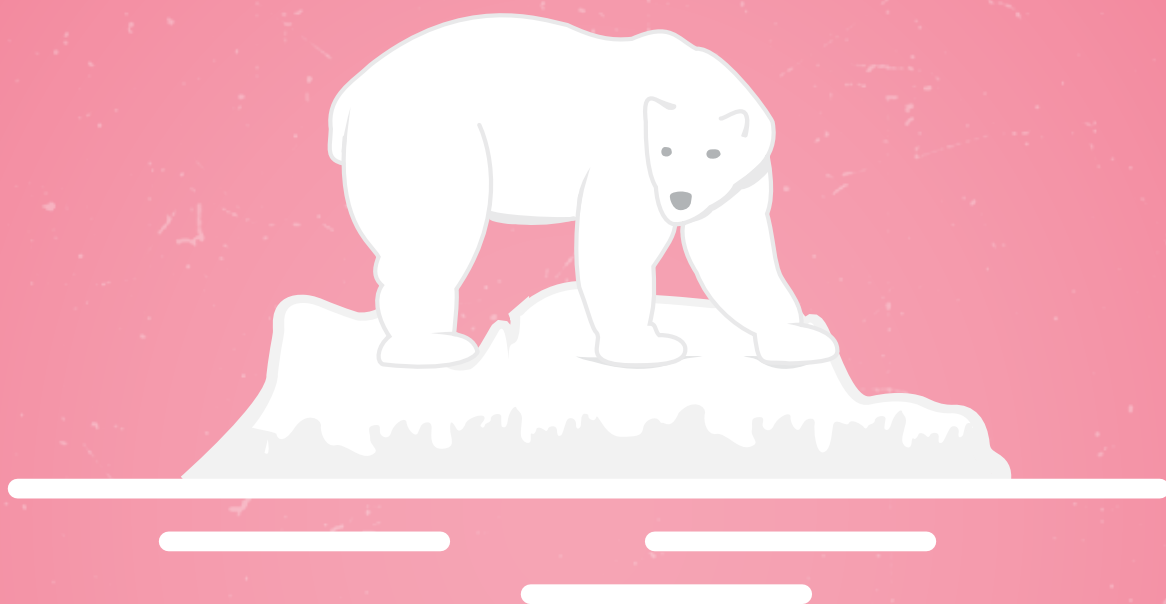


**Figure 2. Human activity/natural processes as causes of climate change?**

**Source:** Ipsos Climate Change Survey 2017

**Base:** All respondents

**Q3.** What best describes your opinion about the causes of climate change?



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

**Figure 3.** When, if at all, will climate change cause...

**Source:** Ipsos Climate Change Survey 2017

**Base:** All respondents

**Q7.** In how many years, if at all, do you think climate change will cause the following in Australia?

# Climate change is a pressing issue with serious consequences

Most Australians think that climate change is already underway (62% either strongly or somewhat agree).

More than half (54%) agree that it poses a serious threat to our way of life over the next 25 years. This increases to 64% agreement when considering the next 100 years.

## But do we understand it?

Half (50%) of Australians think they understand the causes and likely impacts of climate change. Likewise, 50% think there are too many conflicting opinions for the public to be confident about claims made about climate change.

This leaves us in a bit of bind – overall we think it's a real and serious threat, but many of us are not confident about our understanding of climate change. It is still, to an extent, a contested topic for many Australians.

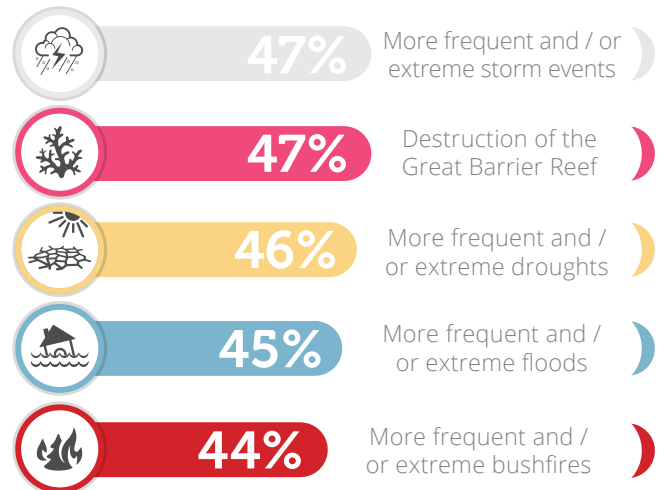
## What are the impacts of climate change?

The preference of most Australians for living close to the coast makes us especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change (including sea level rise, storm surges and droughts).

To gauge how immediate Australians feel the impacts of climate change are, we presented a range of ecological issues. Participants were asked whether they believe climate change is already causing each issue, or how many years until climate change would cause it (or whether climate change would not cause it at all).

Between a quarter (24%) and half (48%) believe that climate change is already having an impact on all the issues listed. Extreme weather events and other natural phenomena were most likely to be selected as being caused by climate change.

## The top five processes that Australians believe are already impacted by climate change:



Since 2014, frequent and / or extreme droughts topped the list in terms of proportion of Australians indicating climate change was already causing this process. However, this year more frequent and / or extreme storm events takes the top spot, jointly with destruction of the Great Barrier Reef.

Storm events may well be top of mind after severe tropical cyclone Debbie made landfall near Airlie Beach at the end of March 2017, causing significant damage and 14 deaths. Likewise, coral bleaching and sedimentation in the reef due to land clearances in Queensland have garnered attention in the media.

A third (32%) of Australians believe that increased annual rates of heat-related deaths are already being caused by climate change (coming in at 10th of the 11 processes tested in terms of agreement climate change was already triggering these events). Yet, in terms of natural disasters, research shows that heatwaves are the cause of largest number of deaths in Australia.

<sup>4</sup>Loridan et al, 2016, The Excess Heat Factor as a metric for heat-related fatalities: defining heatwave risk categories, Australian Journal of Emergency Management, Volume 31, No. 4, October 2016



Who should be mainly responsible for action  
on climate change?

05

# Who's responsible for action on climate change, and who's doing a good job?

—

Prime Minister  
Turnbull announced  
the decision to  
adopt a National  
Energy Guarantee  
instead of Clean  
Energy Target



..... BELIEVE THAT .....  
THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT  
IS RESPONSIBLE  
FOR TAKING ACTION  
.....

As in previous years, Australians are most likely to think that the Federal Government carries the responsibility for action on climate change. Two-in-five (41%) identified Federal Government. The 2017 data was collected shortly after Prime Minister Turnbull announced the decision to adopt a National Energy Guarantee (NEG) instead of the Clean Energy Target (CET) recommended by Chief Scientist Alan Finkel. Perhaps it is unsurprising then, that this year's report sees the joint highest proportion of Australians placing the bulk of responsibility with Federal Government since we started asking this question in 2010 (tying with 2014).

# 1/5 Australians



Believe that the **international community** is mainly responsible for taking action

**Two-in-five  
(41%) Australians  
identified  
the Federal  
Government as  
being mainly  
responsible  
for action on  
climate change**

One-in-five Australians (20%) identified the international community as being mainly responsible for action on climate change (on par with previous years). The international community is still held to account by Australians with 64% agreeing that other countries should be doing more to address climate change.

Although Australians are most likely to say greenhouse gas emissions from industry cause climate change (57%), they are loath to point the finger at business and industry as being mostly responsible. On climate change, just 5% feel that business and industry should be mainly responsible for action on climate change. This is the lowest proportion laying responsibility with business and industry since 2010.

On a two-party preferred basis, Labor voters are more likely to identify Federal Government as being mostly responsible for action compared with Liberal voters (33%).

In 2017, Australians consider the international community to be performing best of the parties tested. More than one in five (22%) feel that the performance of the international community is very or fairly good (compared with 19% in 2016).

This means the international community overtakes State Governments in relation to perceived performance on climate change. In 2016, 20% said State Governments. This year, State Governments and the Federal Government sit in second place and 18% rated both these levels of government as very or fairly good. As in 2016, business and industry was considered the lowest performer (15% rated their performance as good).

Although business and industry is regarded as being the poorest performer of the groups tested, combined with such a low expectation of leading action on climate change, arguably this poor perception of performance is not as relevant as it is for the Federal Government (which carries the greatest weight of responsibility).

Liberal voters are far more complimentary about the current Federal Government's performance on action on climate change (31% gave a good rating compared with 16% of Labor voters and 10% of Greens voters).





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

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# Focus on renewable energy targets

## 69%

Support this scenario  
15% are opposed

In light of the recent policy activity in relation to the Clean Energy Target and National Energy Guarantee, questions were included in 2017 to gauge support for four renewable energy target scenarios.

### A national target on renewables-sourced energy set by the Federal Government

Support is highest for a Federal Government-set national target for the portion of energy generated from renewable sources whilst 69% support this idea (32% strongly support and 36% tend to support), and just 15% opposed (either tend to or strongly) this kind of target.

## 53%

Support this scenario  
26% are opposed

### State and territories setting targets

There are also high levels of support for states and territories setting their own targets for the proportion of energy generated by renewable sources, as long as they are higher than a minimum set by the Federal Government. More than half of Australians (53%) support this concept while a quarter (26%) oppose it.

There was less support for the idea of states and territories setting their own targets for the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources if there was no caveat about a national target. For this situation, support and opposition was more balanced (43% and 38% respectively).

## 27%

Support this scenario  
48% are opposed

### Leaving it to market forces

The least supported policy tested was allowing the market to determine the level of uptake of renewable energy (not having a national target for the proportion of energy consumption that is generated by renewable sources).

Although more than a quarter (27%) supported this, almost a half (48%) noted opposition. Males were more likely than females to support this approach (32% of males vs. 23% of females). Unsurprisingly, Liberal voters were more likely to be supportive of letting the market determine uptake of renewable energy (37% vs. 21% of Labor voters on a two-party preferred basis).



# Summary

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Despite a recent move towards global consensus on climate change action, the views of Australians have remained relatively stable. That climate change is caused by human activities is not disputed by the majority of the public, but those who oppose this idea remain a significant minority.

For those wishing to continue to advocate for reforms to tackle climate change and mitigate the impacts, there is still a long way to go to move the public discourse on climate change. There is still substantial confusion about some aspects of climate change causes and impacts and a risk that Australians will become further disengaged unless they feel empowered (through communities or via our Government) that progress can be made.

Australians see the Federal Government as mainly responsible for action on climate change and furthermore, are supportive of the Federal Government setting a national target for the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources.

Although we see business and industry as being responsible for many of the processes that cause climate change, we do not see it as the key party to take action. That responsibility is seen as resting with the Federal Government. This makes climate change action policies all the more critical in the eyes of the community.

# Contact

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

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