

Who Cares About Climate Change?

Australian environmentalists have led a range of successful campaigns over the last three decades. While the damming of Lake Pedder in 1972 is still lamented by environmentalists as a substantial loss of an iconic wild lake, it was an important early campaign in the history of a fledgling protest movement. The lessons learned from the loss of Pedder forged a generation of activists, with a string of successful campaigns conducted soon after. These include the first Australian non-violent protest action at Terania Creek in northern New South Wales (1979), the Nightcap Range campaign at Mount Nardi, also in New South Wales (1982), the Franklin River campaign that prevented damming of an iconic wild river in Tasmania (1983), and the campaign to protect the Daintree at Cape Tribulation in far north Queensland (1983–1984) (see Hutton and Connors 1999; Turvey 2006). Many of these early protest-based campaigns centred on the protection of old growth forests and wild rivers, environmental issues that lend themselves to successful framing by mass media (Hutchins and Lester 2006). The aesthetic values of wild areas had a powerful influence upon public opinion, with ‘wilderness’ photographers particularly important in conveying the environmental message through newspapers and television.

Appearing in both the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* in 1983, Peter Dombrovskis’ iconic photo of Rock Island Bend on the Franklin River is an excellent example of the power of ‘wilderness’ imagery to garner public opinion. However, in spite of the success of the Australian environmental

movement, some argue that the days of major protests for attracting public support to environmental causes are largely over. Is the Australian public experiencing ‘green fatigue’ from myriad campaigns over recent decades? Are Australians less supportive of global concerns such as climate change compared to national or local issues, and to what extent is environmental fatigue influencing attitudes towards climate change?

When it comes to media framing, global warming and climate change are fundamentally different to other environmental issues. Many environmentalists do adopt behaviours that address climate change, such as reducing their electricity consumption, installing solar panels, using public transport, walking or cycling where possible, recycling or engaging in a variety of selective consumption practices (Tranter 2014). However, these tend to be ‘converts’ who believe climate change is mainly anthropogenic, and that global warming is mainly due to human impact upon the global environment. For these people, climate change is an issue that needs addressing now, rather than at some point in the future. Yet local issues that have global outcomes, such as forest preservation, preventing or reducing the extraction of fossil fuels, and reducing energy consumption are far more difficult to market to the ‘unconverted’. This is particularly the case when behavioural change is necessary to address future-oriented, less tangible *global* environmental outcomes, such as climate change. In such instances, many will not respond to calls for action, particularly if this involves substantial change to their lifestyle and consumption practices.

Addressing climate change involves sacrifices to one’s standard of living, either directly by reducing energy consumption by, for example, using less electricity, driving less, driving smaller cars and recycling more, or indirectly, such as by paying higher taxes to support ‘clean’ energy production. Many people also believe that the large-scale changes necessary to address anthropogenic climate change (if indeed they accept that it is occurring) will have a deleterious impact upon economic growth, and/or that such changes will leave Australia at an economic disadvantage relative to other countries competing in the globalised marketplace. For example, Pietsch and McAllister (2010, p. 232) found that although most Australians ‘are generally willing to pay for environmental protection’ and tend to *understand* the idea of an emissions trading scheme, ‘a large minority remains to be convinced of the merits of an ETS’. The majority of Australians claim to recycle more and use less water because of the environment, but far fewer were willing to pay higher taxes,

higher fuel prices, or more for electricity in order to prevent global warming (Tranter 2014).

In this chapter, we interrogate national survey data from the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (AuSSA) to examine the relative importance of climate change vis à vis other environmental issues of concern to Australians. We then examine how likely Australians are to believe climate change is occurring and, for the large majority of those who do, examine their views regarding its causes. We show how a range of social and political background characteristics, and the type of media Australians rely upon for their news and information, is associated with their attitudes towards climate change. We also draw upon interviews conducted with environmental leaders to examine their views regarding the way the Australian environmental movement has engaged with the issue of climate change. To what extent were environmental organisations successful in championing this most important of environmental issues, according to its leaders?

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN AUSTRALIA

Environmental issues have been studied by Australian academics for more than 25 years, including environmental-issue salience (for example, Papadakis 1993) and the impact of the environment as an election issue (for example, Bean et al. 1990). Jan Pakulski and other scholars have written on *green* and *brown* environmental-issue priorities (for example, Crook and Pakulski 1995; Pakulski and Crook 1998; McAllister and Studlar 1999; Pakulski and Tranter 2004). ‘Green’ concerns, such as the logging of old-growth forests and destruction of wildlife, tend to be prioritised by environmental organisations and members of environmental groups, whereas the ‘brown’ issues, such as waste disposal and pollution, tend to be of greater concern to the general public.

In recent years, the focus for social scientists has shifted towards the study of attitudes and behaviour relating to climate change (for example, Pietsch and McAllister 2010; Tranter 2011, 2013, 2014, 2017a, b; Fielding et al. 2012; Tranter and Booth 2015; Spies-Butcher and Stebbing 2015). Climate change is a highly politicised environmental issue that divides citizens along ideological and party political lines. Those on the right of the political spectrum tend to be against ‘action’ to address climate change, and are more likely than the left to reject anthropogenic climate change outright (Tranter and Booth 2015; Tranter 2017a, b),

similar to the political divisions over environmental-issue support more broadly (Crook and Pakulski 1995; Tranter 2013). The left are far more concerned about its impact. Social divisions are also extant: women are more concerned about climate change than men (Tranter 2014), while having a tertiary education influences climate-change attitudes among Australians (see below, and also Tranter 2011; Tranter and Booth 2015) in a similar manner to Americans (Hamilton 2010; McCright 2010).

Yet, perhaps the most important indicator of one's stance on climate change in a variety of countries, including Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, is political party affiliation (see, for example, Fielding et al. 2012; Hamilton 2010, 2011; McCright 2010; McCright and Dunlap 2011; Poortinga et al. 2011; Tranter 2011; Tranter and Booth 2015; Whitmarsh 2011). Those who identify with conservative parties are far less likely than progressive party identifiers to be concerned about climate change/global warming. In Australia, the Australian Greens and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) partisans tend to be more supportive of action on climate change than supporters of the Liberal and National party coalition (Tranter 2014, 2017a, b).

One's sources of information and news also appear to influence climate-change attitudes. Some news media have adopted a far more sceptical stance regarding the science of climate change than others (Bacon 2013). The degree of trust placed in information sources is also critical. Lucas et al. (2015, p. 80) found that public trust in climate scientists declined following 'climategate', when right-wing journalists claimed 'warmist' IPCC scientists conspired to misrepresent climate-change data, although the scientists involved were exonerated of any wrongdoing (Bricker 2013; Leiserowitz et al. 2012).

MEASURING CLIMATE CHANGE ATTITUDES

We begin our investigation by highlighting the importance of a range of environmental issues to Australians based upon questions we commissioned for the AuSSA. The 2013 AuSSA is a nationally representative survey of Australian adults drawn from the Australian Electoral Roll. It has a sample size of 1,636 and a response rate of 35% (Blunsdon 2016a).

The environmental questions in the 2013 AuSSA first asked respondents to *rate* the importance of 12 environmental issues. As can be seen in

Table 2.1 Urgency of environmental issues (%)

		<i>Urgent/very urgent</i>
1	Marine conservation	81
2	Destruction of wildlife	80
3	Waste disposal	79
4	Pollution	78
5	Soil degradation	71
6	Logging of forests	70
7	Climate change	63
8	Extreme weather events	60
9	Loss of biodiversity	58
10	Mining	56
11	Overpopulation	51
12	Nuclear power	41

Table 2.1, almost all of the 12 environmental issues listed are claimed to be urgent or very urgent by a majority of Australian adults.

Marine conservation, destruction of wildlife, waste disposal and pollution were rated ‘very urgent’ or ‘urgent’ by around 80% of the sample, while soil degradation and logging of forests were urgent for approximately 70% of those surveyed. Biodiversity, mining and overpopulation were less urgent, with nuclear power of least concern at only 41%. By contrast, climate change sits in the middle of these issues, at 63%. These results suggest that, relative to other environmental issues, Australians do not tend to see climate change as a particularly pressing environmental issue, which is perhaps why it is difficult to motivate people to act to attenuate the impact of global warming.

Yet the survey responses should not be interpreted as evidence that Australians are unconcerned about climate change. In survey research, ranking and rating questions sometimes elicit quite different responses, as appears to be the case here. When asked to rank the 12 issues in terms of how much Australians worried about them (‘Which two environmental issues have worried you the most in the last 12 months?’), the focus switched to climate change and pollution. Climate change was the issue that concerned people the most in the past 12 months. It was most frequently prioritised and was equal top of the second-choice list alongside pollution (Table 2.2). Overall, climate change and pollution were almost equally important to Australians, although it is worth noting that those who tend to prioritise climate change have quite different demographic profiles to those who chose pollution as most concerning.

Table 2.2 Environ-
mental issues of most
concern in the last
12 months

	<i>Most</i>	<i>2nd Most</i>	<i>Combined %</i>
Climate change	22	11	33
Pollution	20	11	31
Overpopulation	10	10	20
Marine conservation	7	12	19
Extreme weather events	8	10	18
Destruction of wildlife	7	11	18
Waste disposal	6	9	15
Mining	5	6	11
Logging of forests	4	6	10
Soil degradation	3	5	8
Nuclear power	4	3	7
Loss of biodiversity	2	5	7
N	(1,485)	(1,480)	

Pollution has been an important environmental issue in Australia since at least the 1980s (Pakulski and Crook 1998). While many waterways are now cleaner, and the air quality of Australian cities is high in international comparative terms, pollution clearly remains an important concern for many Australians. Interestingly, a relatively large proportion of people were also worried about overpopulation, an issue that is generally placed in the ‘too hard basket’ by politicians and environmentalists alike, including the Australian Greens. When we analysed the population issue in more detail elsewhere, we found those who are concerned about immigration also tend to be very concerned about overpopulation (Tranter and Lester 2015).

Climate change has received substantial media coverage nationally and internationally and has been subject to negative campaigns in Australia (as it has in the United States), particularly by the Murdoch-controlled media networks, News Corp. *The Australian* newspaper and conservative media commentators such as the prominent climate sceptic Andrew Bolt present a consistent anti-climate change line in print and on television (Bacon 2013). These anti-climate change messages appear to resonate with particular segments of the Australian population. This is reflected, as mentioned above, in the demographic and political characteristics of pro-and anti-climate change supporters. Here it is apparent in the differences between those who prioritise climate change as opposed to other environmental issues. To illustrate these differences, we show how social and political background differentiates responses considerably on the

Table 2.3 Background of most urgent environmental issues (%)

	<i>Climate</i>	<i>Pollution</i>	<i>Overpopulation</i>
Men	19 ^a	22 ^a	11 ^a
Women	25 ^b	18 ^a	9 ^a
<i>Age (groups)</i>			
18–29	27 ^a	15 ^{ab}	10 ^a
30–49	25 ^a	15 ^b	10 ^a
50–64	23 ^a	20 ^a	10 ^a
65+	17 ^b	28 ^c	9 ^a
<i>Degree</i>	30 ^a	15 ^a	8 ^a
Non-graduate	18 ^b	23 ^b	11 ^b
<i>Main source of trustworthy info about environmental issues</i>			
Scientists	26 ^a	20 ^a	8 ^a
Environmental orgs	25 ^a	21 ^a	10 ^{ab}
Other source	13 ^b	19 ^a	12 ^b
<i>Political party identification</i>			
Labor	34 ^a	21 ^a	7 ^a
Coalition	10 ^b	19 ^a	13 ^b
Greens	48 ^c	13 ^a	6 ^{ab}
None	21 ^d	20 ^a	10 ^{ab}
Total ranked as most urgent	22	20	10

Notes Different subscripts in each column suggest statistically significant difference at 95% level

Source AuSSA 2013

three issues that concerned Australians most in the 12 months prior to the collection of the 2013 AuSSA survey (Table 2.3).

Certain demographic characteristics are associated with particular issues. For example, age and tertiary education differentiate responses on issues such as pollution and climate change, but in different ways. The tertiary educated are far more likely than non-graduates to prioritise climate change, but the opposite pattern is apparent for pollution. Women are more likely than men to prioritise climate change, but there are no gender differences for pollution, while strong effects are apparent for political party identification. Identifying with the Liberal or National Party is associated with a much lower likelihood of prioritising climate change than among Greens or Labor identifiers or non-partisans. Non-graduates and Coalition supporters are also the most likely to prioritise overpopulation.

Our findings show that the Australian public clearly differentiate environmental issues in terms of their immediacy. They rate marine conservation, destruction of wildlife, waste disposal and pollution as more urgent than climate change. However, when asked to rank these issues, climate change had worried Australians the most in the 12 months prior to the survey administration. The social, and in particular the political, characteristics that divide responses on climate change are similar to profiles of environmental groups and organisations (Tranter 1996). Those who join or support environmental groups tend to be highly educated, politically left-of-centre and urban-based (Tranter 2010). In other words, participants in the Australian environmental movement tend to have these types of characteristics. Environmental leaders are no exception.

The survey data presented above demonstrates that climate change is an important environmental issue for Australians. However, while the overwhelming majority of climate scientists agree that climate change has mostly anthropogenic causes (Anderegg et al. 2010; Cook et al. 2013; Doran and Zimmerman 2009; Oreskes 2004), to what extent are Australians uncertain or sceptical about climate change per se? Before answering this question, we should examine what climate scepticism is.

Climate scepticism is a complex phenomenon (Poortinga et al. 2011) and the opposition of many sceptics to climate science, as Stern et al. (2016) maintain, involves a variety of tactics:

a changing set of arguments—denying or questioning ACC’s [anthropogenic climate change’s] existence, magnitude, and rate of progress, the risks it presents, the integrity of climate scientists, and the value of mitigation efforts.

One of our interviewed leaders was pessimistic about the entrenched views held by those who dispute that the planet is warming because of human activities: ‘There’s a hardcore of people who are ideologically—It doesn’t matter what you say to them they will always just go online and they’ll find some mad whacko’ (Anonymous A, pers. comm., 2014).

Matthews (2015, p. 158) refers to those who reject the notion of anthropogenic climate change outright as ‘strong sceptics’. For Hobson and Niemeyer (2013) this is ‘deep scepticism’, while others have labelled it ‘climate change denial’ (Armitage 2005; Dunlap and McCright 2010; Jacques et al. 2008). Other climate sceptics agree anthropogenic climate change is occurring, but question the rate of change, suggesting the climate is changing far more slowly than climate scientists predict.

Matthews (2015, p. 157) labels such critics ‘lukewarmers’, who, while accepting the notion that the planet has warmed because of CO₂ emissions, claim ‘the global warming scare has been exaggerated’. Then there are ‘moderate sceptics’ for whom planetary warming is unproblematic, because ‘a large proportion of past warming is due to natural processes’ and, once again, ‘the threat posed by climate change has been greatly exaggerated’ (Matthews 2015, p. 158). More recently the term ‘neosceptic’ has emerged to describe those who, while not outright sceptics, do not favour government policies designed to limit anthropogenic climate change (Stern et al. 2016; Perkins 2015).

To answer the question ‘How sceptical of anthropogenic climate change are Australians?’ we examine attitudes towards climate change, drawing upon questions Tranter commissioned for the 2014 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (Blunsdon 2016b). Responses to two of the climate-change questions are presented below. The first asks what respondents believe about climate change (that is, whether it has mainly anthropogenic causes, mainly ‘natural’ causes, if they reject climate change outright, or don’t know). The 2014 AuSSA suggests 90% of Australians believe that some form of climate change is occurring. However less than two-thirds (61%) believe *humans* are the primary cause of climate change (Fig. 2.1), with a substantial proportion claiming

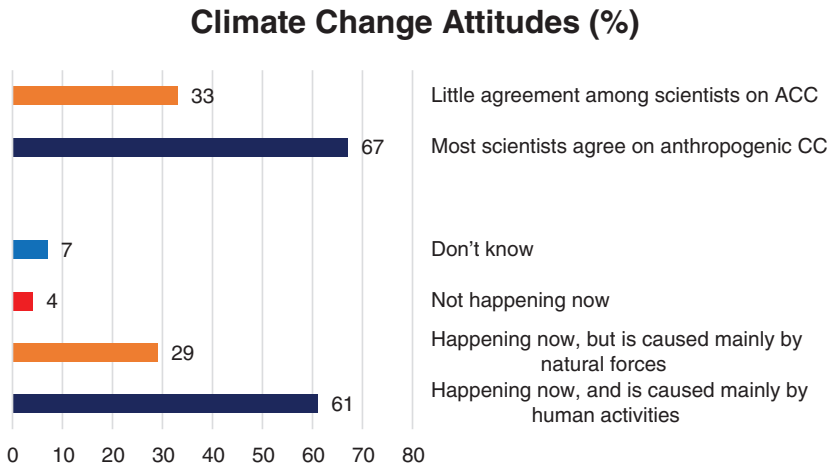


Fig. 2.1 Climate change attitudes in Australia (%)

it has mainly ‘natural’ causes (29%). The latter are moderate sceptics. Only 4% do not believe climate change is happening now (strong sceptics or outright climate-change deniers), and 7% do not know.

Similarly, around two-thirds of respondents to the AuSSA (67%) believe most scientists agree that the climate is changing mainly due to anthropogenic causes, but that still leaves one-third of Australians who believe there is little agreement among scientists over the causes of climate change.

In Table 2.4, we use similar predictors to those in Table 2.3 to examine attitudes on the causes of climate change using data from the 2014 AuSSA. As was the case with the environmental-issue priorities, attitudinal differences based around gender, age, education, source of information and political party identification distinguish attitudes on climate change.

Table 2.4 Background of climate-change attitudes (%)

<i>Most scientists agree climate change is anthropogenic?</i>	<i>You believe climate change is mainly...</i>				
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Anthrop.</i>	<i>‘Natural’</i>	<i>No CC</i>	<i>D.K.</i>
Men	64 _a	56 _a	33 _a	5 _a	6 _a
Women	68 _a	65 _b	24 _b	3 _a	8 _a
<i>Age (groups)</i>					
18–29	84 _a	75 _a	20 _a	2 _{ab}	4 _a
30–49	75 _b	68 _{ab}	22 _a	3 _{ab}	7 _a
50–64	69 _c	64 _b	26 _a	3 _b	7 _a
65+	54 _d	47 _c	39 _b	5 _a	9 _a
<i>Degree</i>					
Non-graduate	77 _a	74 _a	20 _a	2 _a	5 _a
	62 _b	54 _b	33 _b	5 _b	8 _b
<i>Main source of news and information</i>					
Commercial TV/radio	55 _a	48 _a	37 _a	6 _a	9 _a
Newspapers	57 _a	45 _a	37 _a	5 _a	12 _a
Other source	76 _b	72 _b	21 _b	2 _b	5 _b
<i>Political party identification</i>					
Labor	83 _a	78 _a	17 _a	1 _a	5 _{ab}
Coalition	45 _b	38 _b	48 _b	8 _b	7 _{bc}
Greens	96 _c	96 _c	3 _c	0 _{ac}	2 _a
None	67 _d	62 _d	25 _d	3 _c	10 _c
Sample total	67	61	29	4	7

Notes Different subscripts in each column suggest statistically significant difference at 95% level

Source AuSSA 2014

Women are far more likely than men to agree climate change has anthropogenic causes, although acknowledging the anthropogenic causes of climate change declines with age. The now-familiar patterns associated with political party identification are also apparent here. In the 2014 AuSSA, the question relating to source of news asks: ‘Which one of the following sources of information would you say you rely on MOST for your news and information?’ Here we compare commercial TV or radio and newspapers against all other sources. Over 70% of people who rely upon ‘other’ sources of news believe anthropogenic climate change is occurring, compared to less than 50% of people who rely on newspapers or commercial TV and radio. These findings at least partly support Bacon’s (2013) claims regarding the propensity of certain commercial media to cover sceptical views of climate change. Political differences over climate-change attitudes are stark. Coalition supporters (38%) are far less likely than Labor (78%) or Greens (96%) identifiers to believe ACC is happening. At 62%, non-partisans—those who do not feel close to any party—sit in between conservative and more progressive political party identifiers.

The socio-political background of respondents who claim climate change is happening but has mainly natural causes are almost the mirror image of the background of those who believe climate change is anthropogenic. In this case, climate ‘naturals’ (Tranter 2017b) are more likely to be male, older, less educated and politically conservative. Finally, because those who are sometimes referred to as outright sceptics or climate-change ‘denialists’ comprise only a very small proportion of Australians (4%), there are few statistically significant social and political background effects for this category. Still, less educated Australians and, once again, those who consume news from commercial TV/radio or newspapers are most likely to reject the concept of climate change altogether.

CLIMATE CHANGE: ‘A FAILURE TO ENGAGE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT MOVEMENT?’

Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (in)famously described climate change as ‘one of the greatest moral, environmental and economic challenges of our age’ (Australian Politics 2007). We have shown above how Australians regard the causes of climate change (see also

Leviston et al. 2013), and the strong political divisions over this issue (see also Tranter 2011, 2013, 2017a, b). However, in this section we draw upon interviews conducted with environmental leaders to examine their views regarding the way the Australian environmental movement has engaged with the issue of climate change. To what extent were environmental organisations successful in championing this most important of environmental issues, according to its leaders?

Several leaders claimed environmentalists have failed to campaign effectively on climate change, and when they have attempted to do so, have been outmanoeuvred by conservative opponents in Australian Coalition governments, and sceptical mass-media commentators (see Bacon 2013). Large environmental movement organisations, such as The Wilderness Society (TWS) and the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), have tended to focus their campaigns upon state-based and national issues, rather than planetary warming and its global consequences. Yet, several environmental leaders commented explicitly on the *failure* of Australian environmental organisations to engage with the issue of climate change in a way that attracts public support. When asked why so many Australians still seem to reject the science of climate change when near consensus is apparent among climate scientists, one leader with a background in science suggested:

I don't actually see it as a failure of science, I see it's a failure of the conservation movement, on communicating in a way that people will (understand) we've failed [...] We stayed too much in Canberra, we didn't just go back to communicating in a very straight forward way about the risks, you know that it's going to get hotter, it'll get dryer, people will suffer, *you* will suffer, things will not be pleasant. (Anonymous A, pers. comm., 2014)

However, for other leaders, the failure of the Australian environmental movement to shift public opinion substantially on climate change is at least partly due to failures of communication, and to some extent this is linked to scientists. Several leaders spoke of issues they had with scientists. Although seen as experts who underpin the credibility of many of the claims of the environmental movement, scientists are also problematic because of the nature of explanations they give—accounts that may be interpreted as equivocal.

There are very few scientists that make good campaigners, very few. (Gavan McFadzean, pers. comm., 2014)

Ah, scientists are absolutely critical, but they're not issue promoters.
(Christine Milne, pers. comm., 2015)

Some leaders pointed out that the scientific method does not enable scientists to engage the public using strong narratives, because the form of communication they employ often lacks certainty. Scientists tend to speak in terms of probability and likelihood, and qualify their findings when interacting with media, fearing misinterpretation (with good reason, as the baseless but damaging 'climate-gate' scandal demonstrated). The communication of scientific findings is often expressed conservatively. As a former Tasmanian Greens politician suggested: 'The very nature of science is that they don't want to say it' till they've had more peer reviews than you can poke a stick at, because that's the nature of science' (Christine Milne, pers. comm., 2015). Scientists question, and are 'sceptical', in the open-minded, enquiring, 'best-fit-of-data-to-a-given-theory' sense of the term, which is at odds with the advocacy-based approach of environmental campaigners and Greens politicians:

I have been saying for many years that climate change intensifies and makes more frequent extreme weather events ... and Bob Brown was doing exactly the same as I was at the time, and the scientists were saying, 'Well, you can't really prove that yet ... you know the probability is that climate is intensifying them but ... you know, dah-duh-dah-duh-dah.' (Christine Milne, pers. comm., 2015)

Reflecting upon her experience in the environmental movement, a state-based Greens politician suggested:

There is a dawning awareness from the scientific community that they have a responsibility to communicate their work in a way that's user friendly so that all of us can listen to what they have to say and understand it, and be activated by it at some level [...] scientists have been missing from the debate too much on climate [...] they've been frightened by the attacks from the right-wing press. (Cassy O'Connor, pers. comm., 2014)

Yet, as the same leader also observed, partially answering her own question, 'Why would you put your head above the parapet if you know it's going to get kicked really hard?'

Some environmentalists and scholars argue that the best way to address climate change, and to engage the public, is to focus upon local

and national issues that are known to be causally related to global warming. However, for climate change, this must be done without highlighting the global implications of addressing these issues (often reflected in the well-known mantra ‘think globally, act locally’ and considered in relation to media–leader interaction in Chap. 6). That is, avoid using politically loaded terms such as ‘global warming’ and ‘climate change’. For example, campaigning to stop the construction of new operations designed to extract coal seam gas resonates not only with environmentally concerned members of the public, but also those who remain to be convinced that climate change has mainly anthropogenic causes, or even that it is occurring at all. It may prove difficult, or even impossible, to change the views of outright sceptics (Hobson and Niemeyer 2013), those who place a high value on free-market economics and reject regulatory mechanisms to attenuate global warming. Yet Australians who have little knowledge of climate change may well be influenced by local issues that affect them personally, as well as by information from expert sources. We return to this line of argument in Chap. 4 on the Lock the Gate Alliance, a relatively new *modus operandi* that brings together people from a range of disparate backgrounds.

So how can environmentalists use science to support their claims about climate change? One leader with science training and decades of experience as a strategist in the environmental movement suggested two approaches scientists can adopt in relation to climate change. First, they can relate likely effects of climate change to its impact upon the next generation. Evidence from a national survey supports such claims, with Australians far more concerned about the threat of climate change to the next generation than they are to themselves. Tranter (2017b) found that 57% of Australians claim climate change will pose a serious or very serious threat to their way of life, compared to 75% who see it as a threat to the next generation. Even adjusting for the age of respondents, this pattern holds.

Second, although many people are unwilling to engage with climate change because it is such a frightening issue, they may be best persuaded to act by local examples that matter to them personally. For example, the increasing frequency and intensity of bushfires are very likely to be causally associated with a changing climate (Bowman 2016), so linking climate change to local issues such as bushfire risk can mobilise the public.

Writers such as Dan Kahan have argued that the climate-change message needs to engage people at the level of values. Political ideology

underlies attitudes on climate change, as we show with the survey findings above. Those opposing action on climate change tend to be politically conservative, and hold individualistic worldviews, rejecting strategies to reduce carbon emissions, because such an approach clashes with concerns over curtailing economic growth (Kahan 2015; Kahan et al. 2012).

Another environmentalist prominent in a national EMO described how to run a successful campaign based around what are essentially climate-related issues by specifically avoiding the term ‘climate change’ the strategy mentioned above and explored (see above and Chap. 4). He provided an example of a successful grass-roots new-media campaign to oppose drilling for coal seam gas in Gippsland, Victoria. After discovering that an application for drilling had been submitted, local people in the area who were likely to be exposed to the project were contacted and ‘community forums’ were set up. Experts such as water scientists and medical doctors were brought in to inform locals of the implications of coal seam gas:

We consciously decided not to talk about climate change and renewables, but to develop a sense of values. Shared values around what are we wanting to defend here, and then media just followed from there. (Cam Walker, pers. comm., 2014)

Initially this approach did not attract metropolitan media coverage, nor did direct approaches by the EMO to a major Victorian newspaper. Eschewing the ‘traditional’ method of using environmental activists as spokespeople, those with credibility in local communities were engaged to speak:

With our partners we always make sure that we have people prepared to speak in the media, again which builds that sense of credibility because it’s local farmer X or school teacher Y [...] There’s space for a grand voice in these stories, but the primary voice we’ve tried to make sure is always the local voice of concern. (Cam Walker, pers. comm., 2014)

Regional media were interested in the local stories (see Chap. 4), and over time the strategy bore fruit, as stories in regional newspapers attracted the interest of the public and politicians, and eventually even metropolitan media. Interestingly, however, the tactics employed had significant implications for the EMO involved. By concentrating upon local voices

the EMO's *brand* was largely invisible in the campaign. As the leader suggested, this raises a dilemma, 'because of course branding is survival, because it's membership and media and hence money. We consciously decided that the issue was more important than the organisation, so we have suffered as a result' (Cam Walker, pers. comm., 2014). The impact of such media strategies on leadership is explored further in Chap. 6.

The lack of leadership on climate change among mainstream EMOs was also mentioned by leaders. Environmental movement leaders have traditionally emerged because of their campaign successes and knowledge of particular issues gained over long periods of time (Tranter 1995, 2009). This is not necessarily the case with climate change. When asked specifically if environmental leaders were responsible for this failure of communication, one leader suggested, 'Yeah [...] it was an institutional failure to really engage people, yeah' (Anonymous A, pers. comm., 2014). In a similar vein, another highly experienced former leader of a large EMO argued:

The global environmental movement has been useless on climate change [...] what advocacy organisation in the world believes that your problems are going to be solved by government processes? No one. No one with a brain. So why would you do it on climate change? (Alec Marr, pers. comm., 2014—see longer quote in Alec Marr's profile at end of Chap. 1)

According to many experienced Australian environmental leaders, the broader movement and large EMOs have not campaigned effectively on climate change. However, specialised groups have emerged, such as the Australian Youth Climate Coalition and 350.org, that specifically concentrate upon climate change. These groups train young activists and emerging leaders, and develop new ways of engaging the public (see, for example, Dan Spencer's profile at the end of this chapter).

CONCLUSION

Climate change is clearly an important issue for the Australian public. Most Australians have been more worried about climate change than any other environmental issue, according to the 2013 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes. Yet only two-thirds of them believe climate change has mainly anthropogenic causes. While political leaders, and the policies adopted by major political parties, are likely to influence public opinion on this issue (Tranter 2013; Fielding et al. 2012), so, too, is the information

one receives on climate change. Where you get your information really matters (although, like those who believe climate change is occurring, climate sceptics also seek out sources that are closely aligned with their worldviews). Nevertheless, our leader interviews suggest that mainstream environmental organisations have not campaigned effectively on climate change. Their role in changing public opinion on climate change has been minimal—far less effective than it has been for other environmental issues, such as the protection of old-growth forests or threatened species.

There are exceptions, with EMOs such as 350.org and the Australian Youth Climate Coalition focussing specifically on climate change—organisations that tend to be led by younger activists. These organisations, along with the Lock the Gate Alliance, the grass-roots mobilisation against coal and gas development, are seen by many leaders of established EMOs as the way forward on climate change. In the following chapter, we consider the extent to which EMOs have succeeded in gaining media attention for environmental issues during federal election campaigns, and the impact of climate change on the salience of other environmental problems in the public sphere.

PROFILE: DAN SPENCER

Formerly of the Australian Youth Climate Coalition

I grew up in Renmark in South Australia, which is on the River Murray. I went to high school in the state capital, Adelaide, where I studied outdoor education and did a lot of bushwalking, which gave me an appreciation of the fragility of the environment. When I went back to the Riverland one time after a few years of drought, I noticed the banks were dried out and the river was about half the height I remembered. I'm not saying it was all to do with climate change, but I'd been learning about climate change and drought at the time, and I'd heard a lot of stories in the news about its impact on farmers. I could relate to that, having grown up in a country town.

Going in at the Deep End

In 2007, when I was 17, we saw Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth* as part of our high-school science class. Back then we wondered, 'What do we do? Plant trees?' After I left school I went to a

few rallies. When one of my friends was helping start the Australian Youth Climate Coalition in South Australia, I was asked to get involved. That led eventually to the 2010 United Nations climate talks in Cancun, Mexico, where I got to work with young people from all over the world on campaign strategy, not quite knowing exactly how much would be involved. I hadn't had a lot of experience, so in many ways I was thrown in at the deep end. But being at Cancun was really powerful. Hearing firsthand from Indigenous people and Pacific Islanders who were already feeling the impacts of climate change—of countries digging up and burning fossil fuels—made me realise that it was time for me to dedicate as much time as possible to the climate movement.

I really got the sense in Cancun that the UN is like a mirror: it reflects what is happening on the ground in countries. Politicians aren't going to come and commit to something much beyond what they would in their home countries if they're not feeling that pressure to do it. On the last night of the negotiations we stood on the steps outside the main building and counted off the number of people who had died from extreme weather events in the 12 months between the Cancun negotiations and the Copenhagen negotiations the year before. As we were counting, young people shared their stories of how climate change and fossil fuels were impacting their community. The action started with about 100 young people, but we were thrown out—asked to move on. Fourteen of us stayed and continued counting. So we were put on a bus. We didn't know where in Mexico we were being taken. After probably about 20 minutes of driving we asked the bus driver politely if we could get off. We were just left on the side of the road, near a group of Mexican police officers—Federales—with machine guns. We jumped on a public bus back into town. We were all a bit shaken, but it left me wanting to get more involved.

Mobilising Youth

I'm into community organising, political campaigning and trying to make companies, politicians and other powerful decision-makers take climate change seriously. As the age of massive petitions and online campaigns has really taken off, I've learnt that we can't

just settle for that kind of shallow engagement. It's become really clear that we can't afford to lose the on-ground campaigning, because that's where our power as a movement comes from. We need to go deeper and actually get people involved at the grass-roots level, turning up to rallies and taking action beyond the online space.

The AYCC often go into schools and run summits and presentations. We engage young people at universities and training colleges. The AYCC has also worked alongside young Aboriginal women to set up an Indigenous youth-led organisation called 'Seed', which is now driving change. We get out onto the streets and talk to people. When people get involved, we encourage them to spread the word.

I work with young people across the country trying to stop cuts to the renewable energy targets. On one occasion, we surveyed students who are studying for jobs in the renewable energy industry and took 10 of them to Parliament. By taking young people who actually wanted jobs building a clean-energy future to see politicians, we made a tangible connection between the politicians' decisions and these young peoples' futures. It was a voice politicians hadn't heard before, and across the board they listened to the students with a lot of respect.

I'm also a big believer in music as a way of communicating and raising awareness about social issues and social change. I'm a musician, so seeing a lot of artists that I looked up to get involved with concerts about climate change and speak out about it inspired me to do the same. I play in a band called Babylon Burning and we sing about social issues. If the crowd at a rally really gets into the work of a poet or singer, it can be just as powerful, or more powerful, than hearing a speech. And when artists who have a national or international following spread the message in their concerts, I think it really does have a big influence on people. Young people look up to musicians. There's the celebrity factor, but especially with music it goes deeper than that. You're more open to hearing something when it's done through song because it connects with you emotionally.

Leadership

The Australian Youth Climate Coalition is led by young people. Young people have always been leaders in social movements and social change. Martin Luther King was in his twenties when the Montgomery Bus Boycott started.

I don't work only with young people. In the Repower Port Augusta campaign I had the opportunity to work with a lot of older people in the community. I come from a middle-class background, whereas Port Augusta is a working-class community. That campaign involved a broad cross-section of society—local council, union groups, environmental groups, health organisations, and predominantly older people than I was used to working with. It can be quite funny to be seen as a bit of an expert on how to campaign when you're still in your early twenties and learning how to do it as you go along. Even so, if someone who's 60 comes in for the first time, and the person who is 20 has a bit more knowledge, it breaks down the age gap and builds mutual respect for each other. My job was to support leadership in the local community so they could take the campaign further. So it's not a model of leadership where you've got one person telling everyone else what to do. It's much more a democratic form of leadership where people rely on each other, take on tasks, step up and get involved as best they can. The Port Augusta community and I were working together, and I had to respect that.

Courage is a huge part of leadership in activism, and people show it in different ways. One example was the blockade against the Maules Creek coal mine. We've seen such courage and resilience from so many people—not just environmentalists but local farmers and the Gomeri Aboriginal nation standing really strong. I think for people to put their neck out and say 'No, we want to see a transition' in a community that's been built around coal for so long is a huge display of courage. That's an incredibly inspiring show of leadership from a local community who you wouldn't expect to be doing something like that.

I think one of the worst messages young people get is, 'Wait until you're older before you do something.' You don't need to be qualified to be an activist. If you want to get involved and you're passionate about an issue, do it now. Find the support, or ask for it. If you're not getting it, demand it. Organisations like AYCC are out there to support young people. Get that support and get involved now—don't wait.

REFERENCES

- Anderegg, W., J. Prall, J. Harold, and S. Schneider. 2010. Expert Credibility in Climate Change. In *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*.
- Armitage, K. 2005. State of Denial: The United States and the Politics of Global Warming. *Globalisations* 2 (3): 417–427.
- Australian Politics. 2007. Kevin Rudd's Address to UN Bali Conference on Climate Change. <http://australianpolitics.com/2007/12/12/rudd-address-to-bali-climate-change-conference.html>.
- Bacon, W. 2013. *Sceptical Climate Part 2: Climate Science in Australian Newspapers*, Australian Centre for Independent Journalism. <https://www.uts.edu.au/sites/default/files/Sceptical-Climate-Part-2-Climate-Science-in-Australian-Newspapers.pdf>.
- Bean, C., I. McAllister, and J. Warhurst (eds.). 1990. *The Greening of Australian Politics: The 1990 Federal Election*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.
- Blunsdon, B. 2016a. *Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, 2013*. Canberra: Australian Data Archive, The Australian National University.
- Blunsdon, B. 2016b. *Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, 2014*. Canberra: Australian Data Archive, The Australian National University.
- Bowman, D. 2016. Fires in Tasmania's Ancient Forests Are a Warning for All of Us. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/fires-in-tasmanias-ancient-forests-are-a-warning-for-all-of-us-53806>. Accessed 13 April 2016.
- Bricker, B. 2013. Climategate: A Case Study in the Intersection of Facticity and Conspiracy Theory. *Communication Studies* 64 (2): 218–239. doi:10.1080/10510974.2012.749294.
- Cook, J., D. Nuccitelli, S. Green, M. Richardson, B. Winkler, R. Painting, R. Way, P. Jacobs, and A. Skuce. 2013. Quantifying the Consensus on Anthropogenic Global Warming in the Scientific Literature. *Environmental Research Letters* 8 (2). <http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/8/2/024024/pdf>. Accessed 13 April 2015.
- Crook, S., and J. Pakulski. 1995. Shades of Green: Public Opinion on Environmental Issues in Australia. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 30: 39–55.
- Doran, P., and M. Zimmerman. 2009. Examining the Scientific Consensus on Climate Change. *EOS* 90 (3): 22–23.
- Dunlap, R., and A. McCright. 2010. Climate Change Denial: Sources, Actors and Strategies. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, ed. C. Lever-Tracey. New York: Routledge.
- Fielding, K., B. Head, W. Laffan, M. Western, and O. Hoegh-Guldberg. 2012. Australian Politicians' Beliefs About Climate Change: Political Partisanship and Political Ideology. *Environmental Politics* 21 (5): 712–733.
- Hamilton, L. 2010. Education, Politics and Opinions About Climate Change: Evidence for Interaction Effects. *Climatic Change*. doi:10.1007/s10584-010-9957-8.

- Hamilton, L. 2011. Do You Believe the Climate is Changing? Carsey Institute Issue Brief No. 40. Durham: University of New Hampshire.
- Hobson, K., and S. Niemeyer. 2013. What Sceptics Believe: The Effects of Information and Deliberation on Climate Change Scepticism. *Public Understanding of Science* 22 (4): 396–441.
- Hutchins, B., and L. Lester. 2006. Environmental Protest and Tap-Dancing with the Media in the Information Age. *Media Culture and Society* 28: 433–451.
- Hutton, D., and L. Connors. 1999. *A History of the Australian Environment Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jacques, P., R. Dunlap, and M. Freeman. 2008. The Organisation of Denial: Conservative Think Tanks and Environmental Scepticism. *Environmental Politics* 17 (3): 349–385.
- Kahan, D. 2015. Climate Science Communication and the Measurement Problem. *Political Psychology* 32: 1–43.
- Kahan, D., E. Peters, M. Wittlin, P. Slovic, L. Ouellette, D. Braman, and G. Mandel. 2012. The Polarizing Impact of Science Literacy and Numeracy on Perceived Climate Change Risks. *Nature Climate Change* 2: 732–735.
- Leiserowitz, A., E. Maibach, C. Roser-Renouf, N. Smith, and E. Dawson. 2012. Climategate, Public Opinion, and the Loss of Trust. *American Behavioral Science* 57: 818–837. doi:[10.1177/0002764212458272](https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764212458272).
- Leviston, Z., I. Walker, and S. Morwinski. 2013. Your Opinion on Climate Change Might not Be as Common as You Think. *Nature Climate Change* 3: 334–337.
- Lucas, C., P. Leith, and A. Davison. 2015. How Climate Change Research Undermines Trust in Everyday Life: A Review. *WIREs Climate Change* 6: 79–91.
- Matthews, P. 2015. Why Are People Skeptical About Climate Change? Some Insights from Blog Comments. *Environmental Communication* 9 (2): 153–168.
- McAllister, I., and D. Studlar. 1999. Green Versus Brown: Explaining Environmental Commitment in Australia. *Social Science Quarterly* 80 (4): 775–795.
- McCright, A. 2010. The Effects of Gender on Climate Change Knowledge and Concern in the American Public. *Population and Environment* 32 (1): 66–87.
- McCright, A., and R. Dunlap. 2011. The Politicization of Climate Change and Polarization in the American Public's Views of Global Warming, 2001–2010. *The Sociological Quarterly* 52: 155–194.
- Oreskes, N. 2004. The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change. *Science* 306 (5702): 1686.
- Pakulski, J., and S. Crook. 1998. The Environment in Australian Print Media, 1982–1996. In *The Ebbing of the Green Tide? Environmentalism, Public Opinion and the Media in Australia*, eds. J. Pakulski and S. Crook. Occasional Paper Series No 5, School of Sociology and Social Work, University of Tasmania, Hobart.
- Pakulski, J., and B. Tranter. 2004. Environmentalism and Social Differentiation: A Paper in Memory of Steve Crook. *Journal of Sociology* 40 (3): 220–259.

- Papadakis, E. 1993. *Politics and the Environment: The Australian Experience*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.
- Perkins, J. 2015. Mitigation Measures: Beware Climate Neo-Scepticism. *Nature* 522(287). doi:[10.1038/522287c](https://doi.org/10.1038/522287c).
- Pietsch, J., and I. McAllister. 2010. 'A Diabolical Challenge': Public Opinion and Climate Change Policy in Australia. *Environmental Politics* 19 (2): 217–236.
- Poortinga, W., A. Spence, L. Whitmarsh, S. Capstick, and N. Pidgeon. 2011. Uncertain Climate: An Investigation into Public Scepticism About Anthropogenic Climate Change. *Global Environmental Change* 21: 1015–1024.
- Spies-Butcher, B., and A. Stebbing. 2015. Climate Change and the Welfare State? Exploring Australian Attitudes to Climate and Social Policy. *Journal of Sociology* 52 (4): 741–758.
- Stern, P., J. Perkins, R. Sparks, and R. Know. 2016. The Challenge of Climate-Change Neoskepticism. *Science* 353 (6300): 653–654.
- Tranter, B. 1995. Leadership in the Tasmanian Environmental Movement. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 31 (3): 83–93.
- Tranter, B. 1996. The Social Bases of Environmentalism in Australia. *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 32 (2): 61–85.
- Tranter, B. 2009. Leadership and Change in the Tasmanian Environment Movement. *Leadership Quarterly* 20 (5): 708–724.
- Tranter, B. 2010. Environmental Activists and Non-active Environmentalists in Australia. *Environmental Politics* 19 (3): 413–429.
- Tranter, B. 2011. Political Divisions over Climate Change. *Environmental Politics* 20 (1): 78–96.
- Tranter, B. 2013. The Great Divide: Political Candidate and Voter Polarisation over Global Warming in Australia. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 59 (3): 397–413.
- Tranter, B. 2014. Social and Political Influences on Environmentalism in Australia. *Journal of Sociology* 50 (3): 331–348.
- Tranter, B. 2017a. Climate Scepticism in Australia and in International Perspective. In *Australian Social Attitudes IV*, ed. S. Wilson and M. Hadler. Sydney: Sydney University Press.
- Tranter, B. 2017b. It's only Natural: Conservatives and Climate Change in Australia. *Environmental Sociology*. doi:[10.1080/23251042.2017.1310966](https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2017.1310966).
- Tranter, B., and K. Booth. 2015. Scepticism in a Changing Climate: A Cross-National Study. *Global Environmental Change* 33: 154–164.
- Tranter, B., and L. Lester. 2015. Climate Patriots? Concern over Climate Change and Other Environmental Issues in Australia. *Public Understanding of Science* 1–15. doi:[10.1177/0963662515618553](https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662515618553).
- Turvey, N. 2006. *Terania Creek Rainforest Wars*. Brisbane: Glass House Books.
- Whitmarsh, L. 2011. Scepticism and Uncertainty About Climate Change: Dimensions, Determinants and Change over Time. *Global Environmental Change* 21 (2): 690–700.

Leadership and the Construction of Environmental
Concern

Tranter, B.; Lester, E.; McGaurr, L.

2017, XI, 183 p. 8 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-137-56583-9

A product of Palgrave Macmillan UK