

How we think and feel about climate change: The five Australias

In order to be most effective, climate change communications should specifically target people's beliefs and attitudes concerning climate change.

However, research has shown that these beliefs and attitudes are diverse and wide-ranging.

It is therefore essential to classify the Australian population into groups who share similar views and understandings about climate change.

Climate change communications may then be designed with these specific target audiences in mind.

A recent study* of 3,096 Australian residents used sophisticated profiling methods to classify the population according to their values, attitudes, beliefs, and emotional responses to climate change. This study found that Australians comprised five distinct psychological profiles in their attitudes and beliefs about climate change.

1 DISMISSIVE 9% They expressed strong disbelief in climate change, very low levels of distress and perceived risks, low levels of concern, general disbelief that humans contribute to climate change. They did not believe that they could personally make a difference. They also considered the effects of climate change to be distant in space and time and were distrustful of climate change authorities. Interestingly, despite these views, they held slightly positive attitudes towards clean sources of energy and were in favour of nuclear energy options.

2 DOUBTFUL 12% They expressed relatively low levels of belief in human-related climate change, general disengagement with the issue and distrust of climate change authorities. However, they agreed they were part of nature and experienced some distress when hearing about climate change impacts. They were moderately concerned about the risks of climate change and its consequences for the environment and held favourable attitudes towards clean energy.

3 UNCERTAIN 14% This group was similar in many respects to the DOUBTFUL group, but differed in that they believed that climate change was real and caused by humans. They also tended to believe that Australia would suffer the effects of climate change sooner rather than later. However, they were ambivalent about feeling part of nature and being environmentally friendly and were distrustful of authorities. They held slightly favourable attitudes towards nuclear energy.

4 CONCERNED 39% This group were more knowledgeable on climate change issues than people in the previous three groups. They felt that they were a part of nature and were moderately environmentally friendly. They expressed a moderately strong belief that human-related climate change was occurring and that its effects were imminent and they were distressed when hearing about climate change impacts. They were more acutely aware of the risks of climate change impacts and were concerned about the effects on the environment. Surprisingly, they were slightly distrustful of climate change authorities and only marginally in agreement that they could personally make a difference.

5 ALARMED 26% This group was the most knowledgeable of all on climate change issues. They tended to report strong belief in climate change, the imminence and proximity of its effects, and strong environmental values. They exhibited moderately high levels of concern, distress, and perceived risk, and believed that they could personally make a difference. They also expressed positive attitudes toward clean energy, and higher than average levels of trust in climate change authorities.

*Hine, D.W., Reser, J., Phillips, W. J., Cooksey, R, Marks, A. D. G. , Nunn, P., Watt, S.E., Bradley, G.L., Glendon, A.I. (2013). Identifying climate change interpretive communities in a large Australian sample. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 36, 229-239

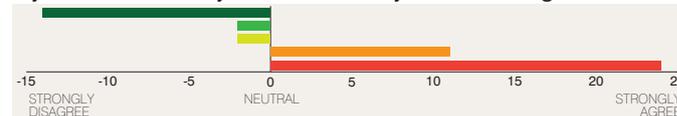
The following charts demonstrate where each of these five groups of Australians stand in relation to their values, beliefs and attitudes about climate change.

These charts reveal some interesting and surprising findings:

- 1 No group was particularly knowledgeable about climate change – even the ALARMED group averaged less than 60% correct responses.
- 2 No group showed trust in climate change authorities – the ALARMED group was ambivalent on the issue.
- 3 No group held robust attitudes towards clean sources of energy – all groups were slightly in favour, but the difference between DISMISSIVES at one end and the ALARMED at the other, was relatively small.
- 4 No group held robust attitudes towards nuclear power.

The values depicted are average responses over the number of questions in each category and the scales represent maximum and minimum values for each measure. Thus, these charts portray absolute scores on the 13 attitude / belief measures that were assessed, rather than relative scores (variation from the mean).

My local area is likely to be affected by climate change



When will Australia start to feel the affects of climate change?



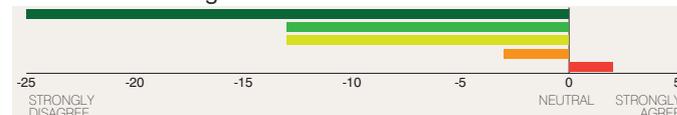
I feel like I am part of nature



I am environmentally friendly



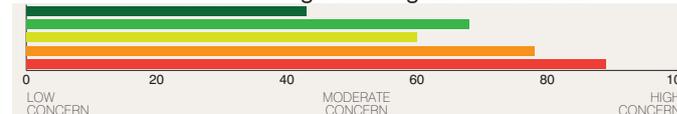
I trust climate change authorities



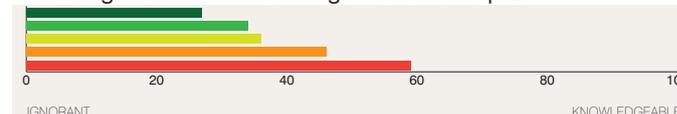
Perceived risks of climate change impacts



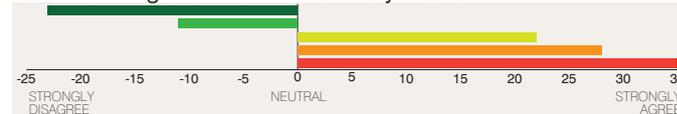
Concern about climate change affecting the environment



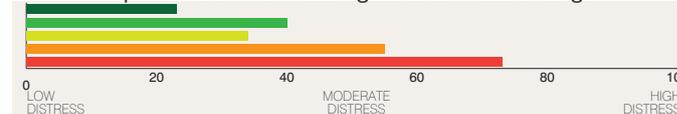
Knowledge about climate change – based on quiz



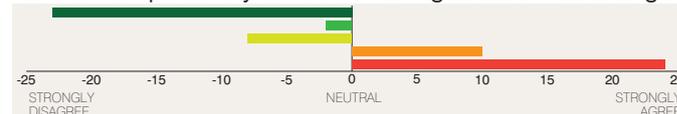
Climate change is real and caused by humans



Distress experienced when hearing about climate change



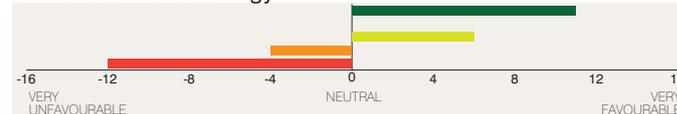
Believe that I personally can do something about climate change



Attitude towards clean sources of energy



Attitude to nuclear energy



LEGEND

- DISMISSIVE
- DOUBTFUL
- UNCERTAIN
- CONCERNED
- ALARMED