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REPORT

AUS

2018

BACKYARD BAROMETER SUMMARY REPORT: Australian Attitudes to Nature



Australia's Backyard Barometer - Summary and Approach



From the Great Barrier Reef across to the Kimberley and down to Tasmania's forests, Australia has one of the most diverse ecosystems on the planet. With more than 21,000 species of plants and animals, 80% of which are found nowhere else in the world, the natural wonders in our 'big backyard' make Australia unique and a point of pride for many Australians.

WWF-Australia's Backyard Barometer aims to provide a deeper understanding of Australian's relationship with the environment and how it has changed over time. This inaugural report is the most comprehensive review of current and historical Australian attitudes towards nature to date – revealing a strong sense of ownership among Australians when it comes to their 'big backyard,' along with rising concerns around environmental issues.

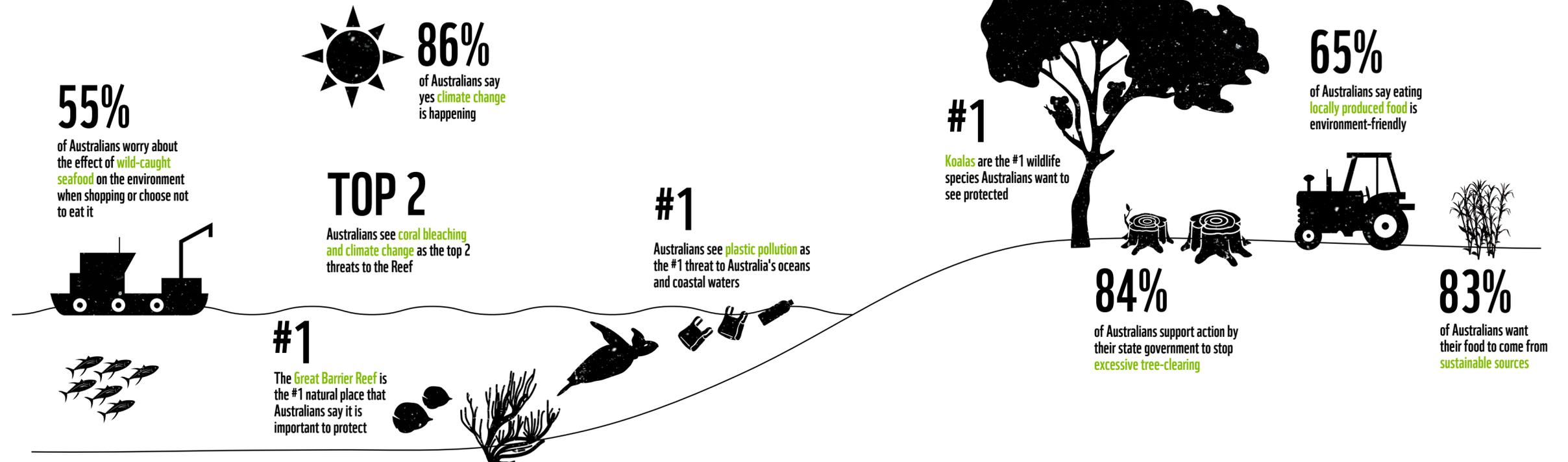
Conducted in partnership with Roy Morgan, the Backyard Barometer study combines 20 years of historical data with a new representative survey of 1,800 Australians – which measures their attitudes towards nature and the environment, specifically looking at four categories:

- **Wildlife, nature and trees**
- **Oceans and the Great Barrier Reef**
- **Sustainable food**
- **Climate change and energy**

This Summary Report highlights key findings. The full report is available at www.wwf.org.au/backyardbarometer

“The Backyard Barometer is part of WWF-Australia's commitment to build our understanding of how Australians relate to the natural world. It's encouraging to see such a strong sense of ownership among Australians when it comes to their 'big backyard' with issues such as the Great Barrier Reef, climate change, plastic pollution and tree-clearing front of mind. It's also inspiring to see that so many Australians are taking practical action to reduce their environmental footprint and looking for the next step both in their own lives and from governments and business – to keep their big backyard healthy and thriving.”

Dermot O'Gorman,
CEO, WWF-Australia



Overview of Environmental Attitudes

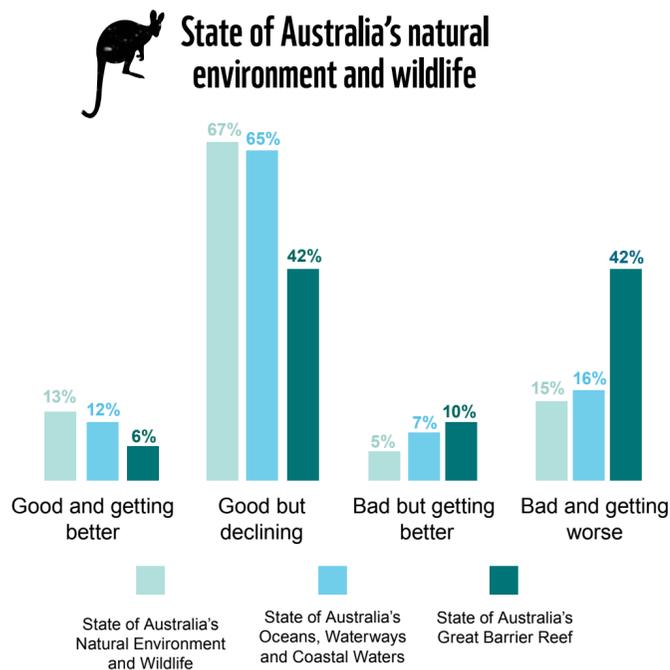
Environment & economy

A clear majority of Australians believe in the environment-economy balance, with two-thirds saying that a healthy, well protected environment and a prosperous economy go hand in hand.

State of the environment

Australians are positive about the current condition of our natural environment and wildlife, with the vast majority (80%) saying it is in a good state. However, when asked about where our natural environment is heading, an even higher number (82%) say that the natural environment is now 'declining' or 'getting worse'. Similarly, 77% of Australians say that the overall condition of oceans, waterways and coastal waters is currently good, but on the question of where oceans are heading, 81% believe that oceans are 'declining' or 'getting worse'.

In contrast, a majority of Australians view the current state of the Great Barrier Reef as already bad (52%), with 84% saying that the Reef is also 'declining' or 'getting worse'.

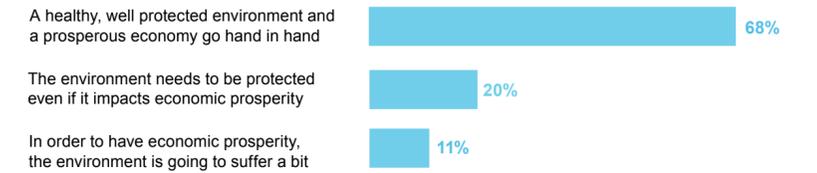


Natural place to protect

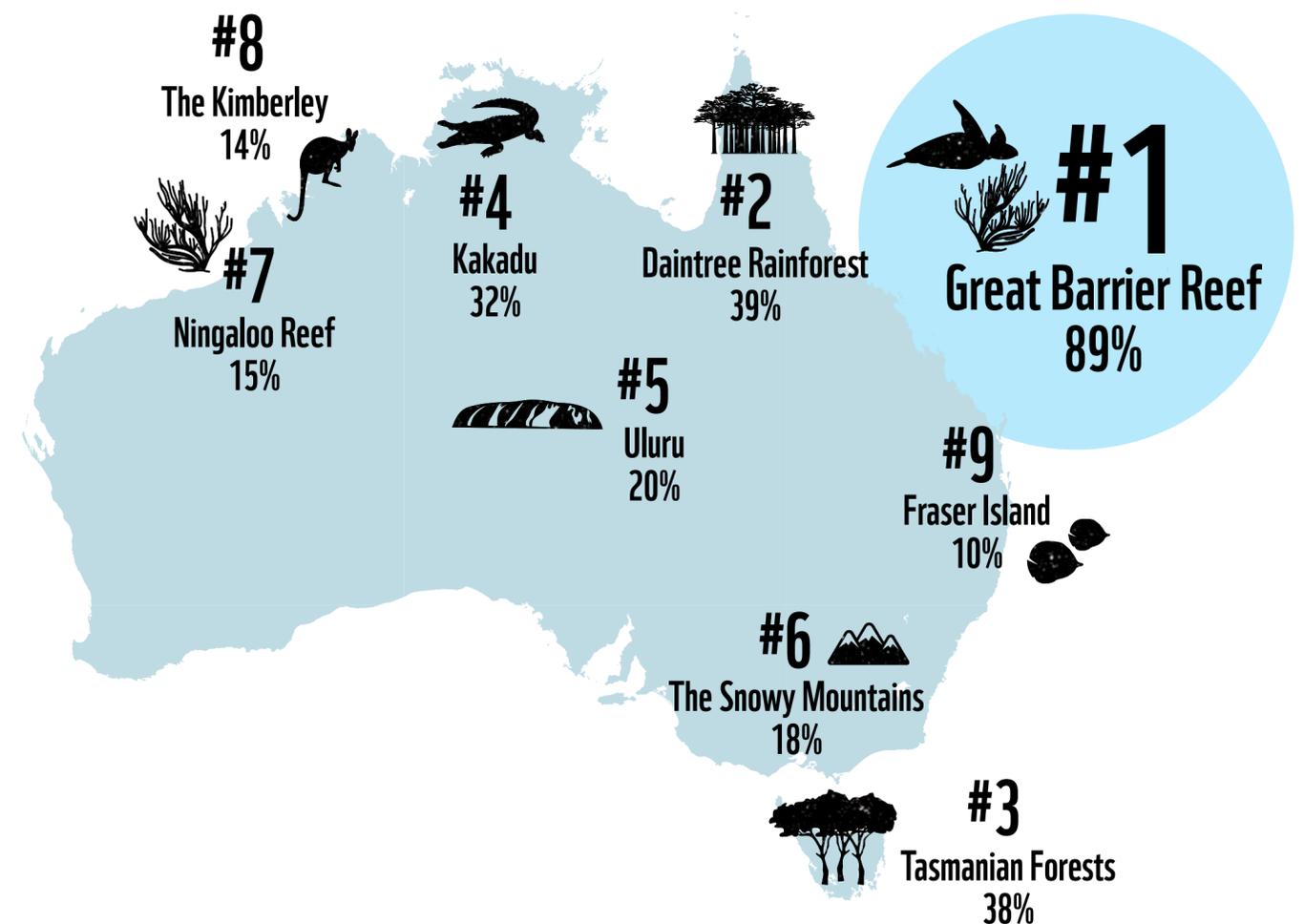
The Great Barrier Reef is clearly the number one natural place that Australians want protected. 89% of Australians included the Reef in their 'top three places to protect', with the Daintree and Tasmanian rainforests in second and third spots at 39% and 38% respectively.



Environment economy balance



Most important places for Australia to protect





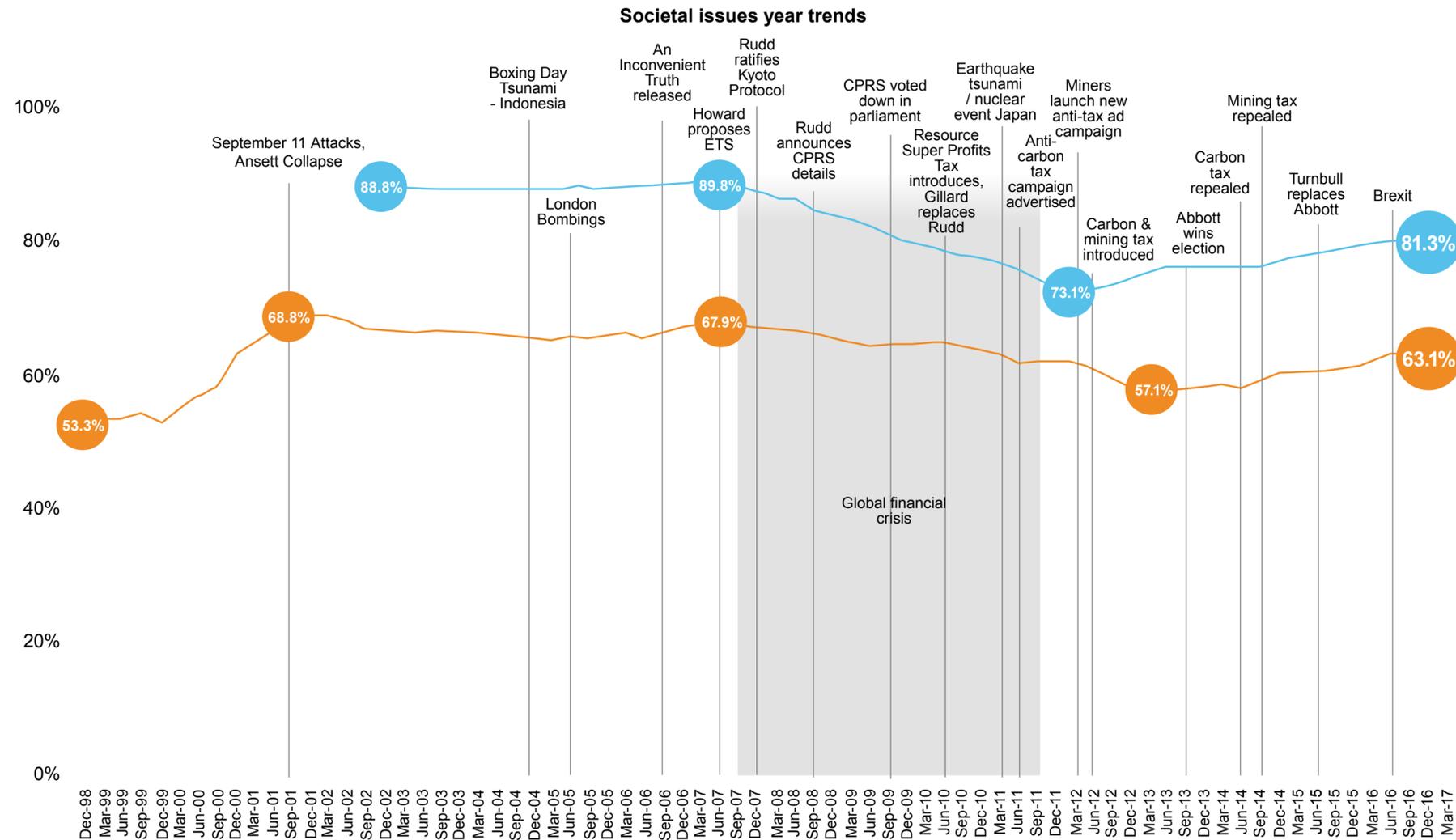
Overview of Environmental Attitudes

Are attitudes changing over time?

Australians' concerns and attitudes to the environment have shifted in the last two decades. Historical data shows that attitudes towards the environment have changed in the backdrop of larger economic and political developments. Attitudes towards the environment softened from late 2007 as the Global Financial Crisis kicked in and plans to introduce a carbon price triggered the so-called 'carbon wars'. However, from 2012 environmental concern and support for action have been on the rise.

Despite these ups and downs, over the past 20 years a clear majority of Australians have consistently said 'act now' on environmental problems (lowest result 73% in 2012) and 'at heart I'm an environmentalist' (lowest result 53% in 1998).

Changing attitudes over time



If we don't act now we will never control our environmental problems

At heart I'm an environmentalist

Wildlife, Nature and Trees



Overall, the top reasons why Australians believe wildlife, forests and natural places are important are: that they are critical to maintaining the balance of nature, and that it is the responsibility of the current generation to leave nature healthy for the future generations.

Iconic species to be protected

As one of the most popular animals in Australia, the koala gets the top spot when it comes to the iconic wildlife species that Australians would most like to see protected. The whale and bilby follow with an equal 30% of Australians wanting to see them protected the most; turtles and dugongs are not far behind with 23% and 19% respectively.

Attitudes to Australia's wildlife and natural environment

81% of Australians agree that there is a need to be growing more trees than we are cutting down (which is not happening right now). 82% say they are worried about future generations growing up with less access to nature and wildlife. More than three-quarters (77%) would like to see more native wildlife and thriving nature in their local area, and 73% would like to have more national parks and nature reserves.

Preferred government policies for protecting wildlife and nature

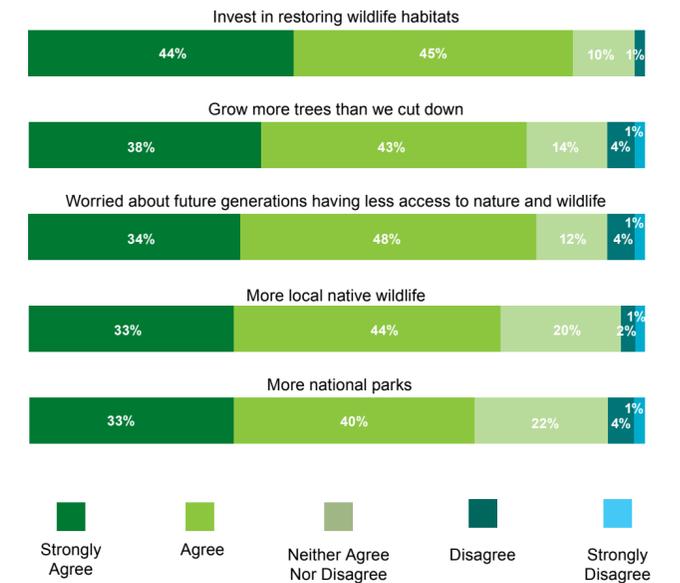
Australians believe that 'introducing stronger landclearing laws' is the best way government can protect wildlife and nature through policy, with 34% ranking it as their first choice. The other favoured policies are to 'buy land that has high biodiversity and dedicate it as a national park' (ranked one by 20%) and 'provide financial incentives for landholders to protect nature on their land' (ranked one by 17%).



Preferred government policies for protecting wildlife and nature

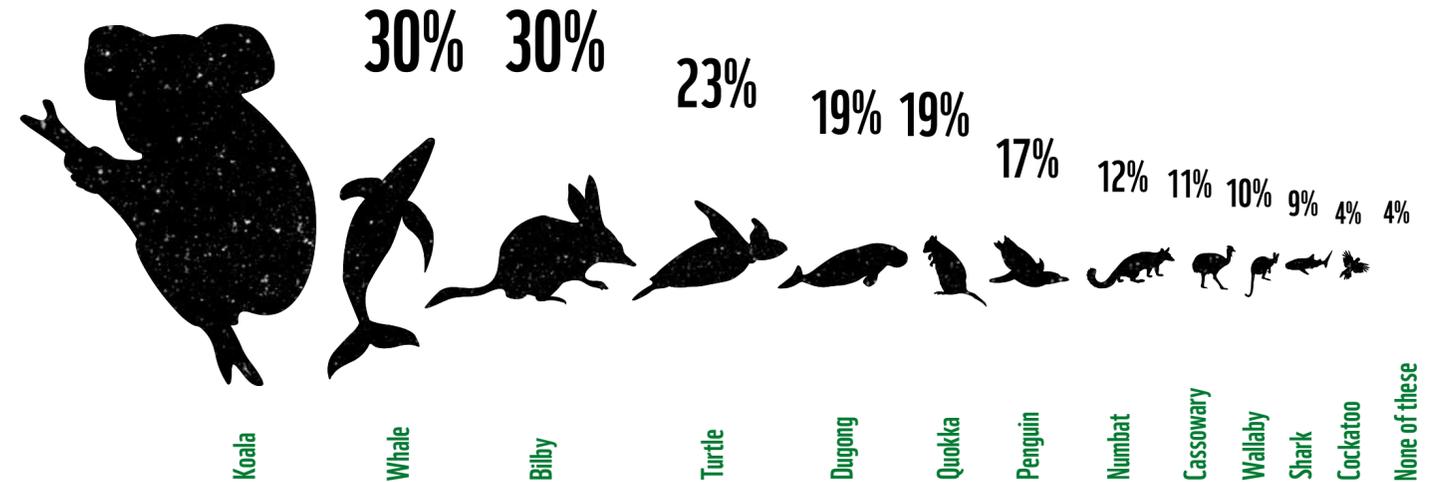


Attitudes to Australia's wildlife and natural environment



53%

Which of these species would you most like to see protected?





Oceans and the Great Barrier Reef

Backyard Barometer confirms the commonly held belief that, as inhabitants of ‘the world’s biggest island’, Australians have a strong affinity to oceans and coastal environment, with 81% saying the coast and ocean is central to the Aussie way of life.

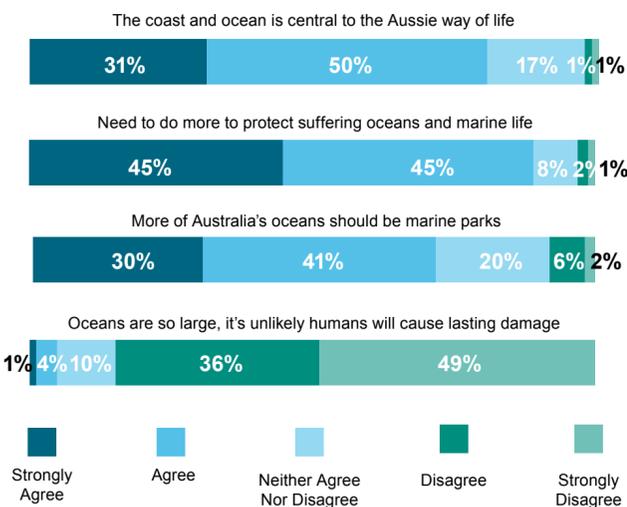
Australians also strongly support action to protect our oceans. Nine out of ten Australians agree that we need to do more to protect oceans and marine life, and 71% agree that more of Australia’s oceans should be marine parks. Encouragingly, only 5% believe that oceans are ‘so large that it is unlikely that humans will cause lasting damage to them’.

The Great Barrier Reef

A large proportion (59%) of Australians said they value the Great Barrier Reef for its environmental value – being home to unique fish species and wildlife like turtles, dugongs, dolphins and whales. Only 7% said they value the Reef for its economic value – providing over 69,000 Australians jobs in tourism.

Attitudes to Australia’s oceans and coastal waters

How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?



Threats to the oceans and the Great Barrier Reef

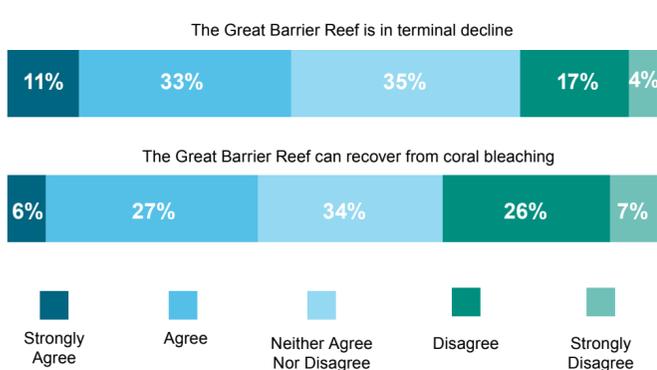
Australians see plastic and chemical pollution followed by global warming as the top three threats to the oceans and coastal waters (85%, 71% and 58% respectively).

Successive coral bleaching events on the Great Barrier Reef in 2016 and 2017 appear to have made a big impression on Australians. Coral bleaching followed by climate change are now perceived to be the two greatest threats to the Great Barrier Reef (50% and 42% respectively). Crown of thorns is third at 25%.

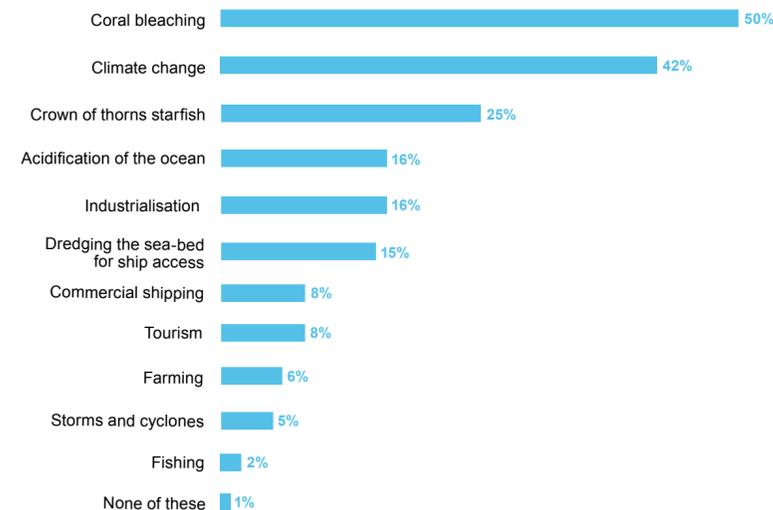
The Backyard Barometer also reveals a big challenge for Reef custodians and for Australia’s tourism industry. Essentially, Australians are evenly split about whether the Reef can recover from coral bleaching (33% agree versus 33% disagree). On a related question, an even higher proportion (44%) say that overall the Reef is in ‘terminal decline’.

Attitudes to the Great Barrier Reef

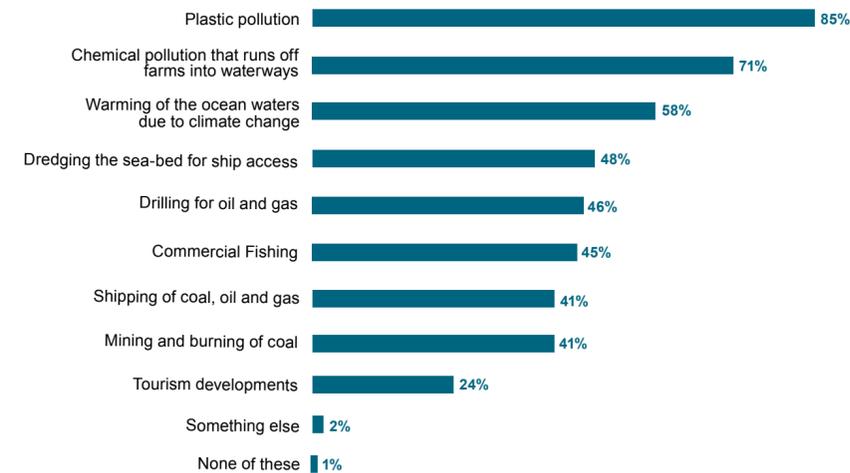
How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?



Perceived threats to the Great Barrier Reef



Perceived threats to oceans and coastal waters



Sustainable Food

Australians are becoming more aware of the food that they put on the table and where it is coming from. A high proportion of Australians (83%) agree the food they eat should come from sustainable sources. Australians also believe that food is no longer just a personal health issue with 49% disagreeing with the statement 'what I eat is about my body and has nothing to do with the environment', whereas only 22% agree.

Concern around effects of food production on the environment

When it comes to the impact specific food products have on the environment Australians are most worried about the effects of palm oil (44% are worried), in light of massive deforestation in Indonesia and Malaysia where 86% of the world's palm oil is produced. The second most concerning food product for Australians is wild-caught seafood with 39% of Australians worried about its effects on the environment. The food products with least level of worry are vegetables and other plant foods, and sugar (44% of Australians state they are not worried about either).

At the checkout

When it comes to making choices around food purchases around seven in ten Australians think Australian grown food is better for the environment than imported food and six in ten are willing to pay more for products they know are sustainable.

When shopping for food, wild-caught seafood ranks as the number one food product that Australians view as important to have a sustainable food label.

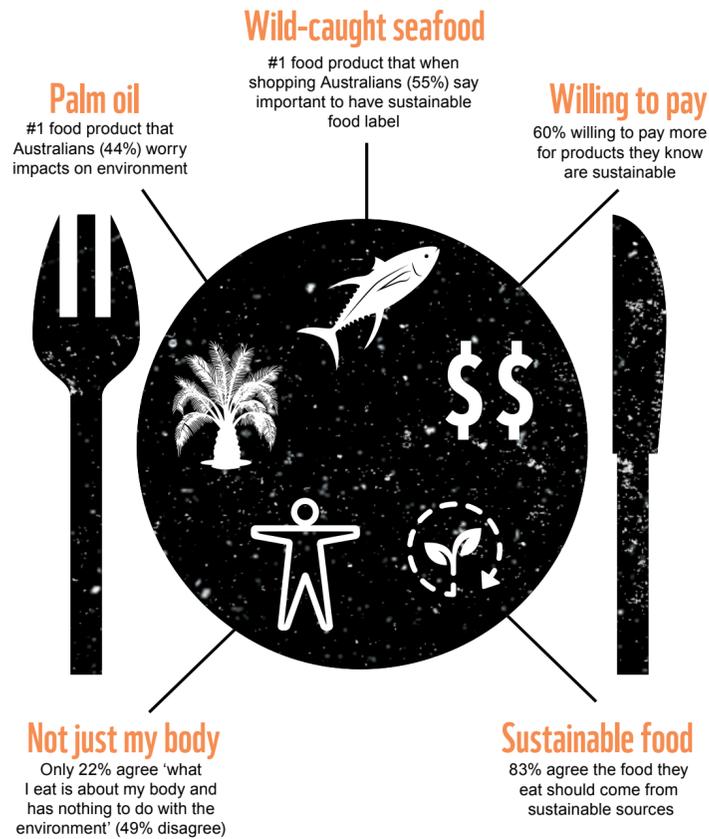
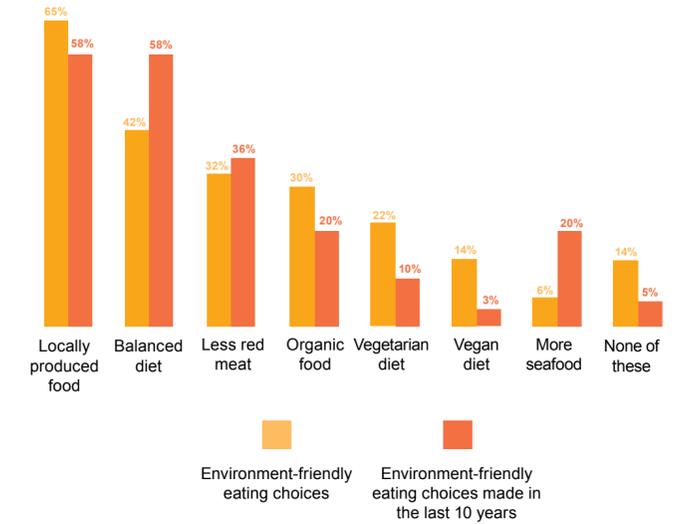
On the plate – environment-friendly eating choices

Most Australians consider eating locally produced food to be an environment-friendly choice (65%) and have made this choice in the last 10 years (58%). Eating a balanced diet follows, with 42% considering it an environment-friendly choice and over half having made this choice in the last ten years. Eating organic food and less red meat are seen as environment-friendly choices by almost one-third of Australians.

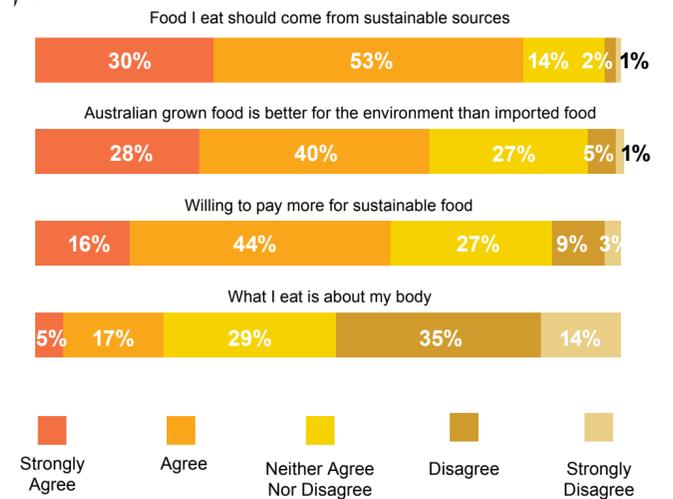
Environment-friendly eating choices



Which of the following actions do you think are environmentally friendly? And which, if any, of these actions have you taken in the last 10 years?



Attitudes to food sustainability in Australia

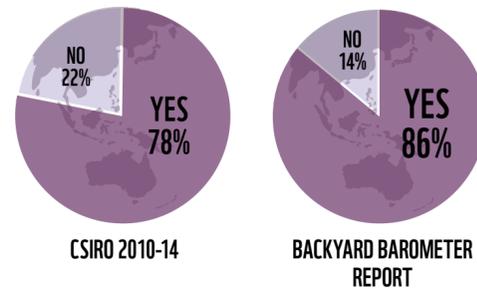


Climate Change and Energy

Is climate change happening?

Backyard Barometer found that 86% of Australians now say 'yes climate change is happening'. This is up from the 2010-2014 CSIRO benchmark* of 78%. On the more specific question of what is causing climate change, 65% of Australians say climate change is happening and humans are largely causing it, up from 46% in 2014.

Is climate change happening?



Attitudes to specific aspects of climate change

The destruction of the Great Barrier Reef is the number one climate change impact that Australians are concerned about (86%). The next top concerns are droughts and floods affecting food supply (84% concerned) and animal and plant species becoming extinct (82% concerned).

Nearly nine in ten people agree that Australia should invest in renewable energy, in the form of solar and wind (87%). Over two-thirds of people think that Australia should act on climate change without waiting for action by the major emitters (69%), and agree that coal and gas pollution is putting our planet at risk (69%).

A historical comparison with Climate of the Nation (CofN) benchmark data* reveals that agreement that 'Australia should be a world leader in finding solutions to climate change' has surged back towards levels last seen in 2008. After falling as low as 52% in

*Backyard Barometer has benchmarked several key results against the CSIRO's *Australian attitudes to climate change: 2010-2014* (discontinued) and the Climate Institute's *Climate of the Nation* (2008-2017, now under the auspices of The Australia Institute).

2012, agreement is now back to 71%, just below the Climate of the Nation 2008 result (76%).

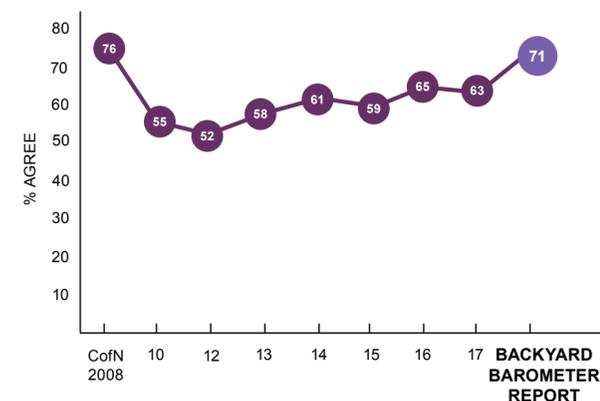
Energy policy priorities and sources

Interestingly, over a third (38%) of the general population do not think it is necessary to prioritise between costs, reliability and reduction of emissions and that they can all be achieved. The remaining population is split equally on this – 20% would like to prioritise the reliability of energy supply, another 20% would prioritise reducing carbon emissions and 18% would like to prioritise keeping energy costs down.

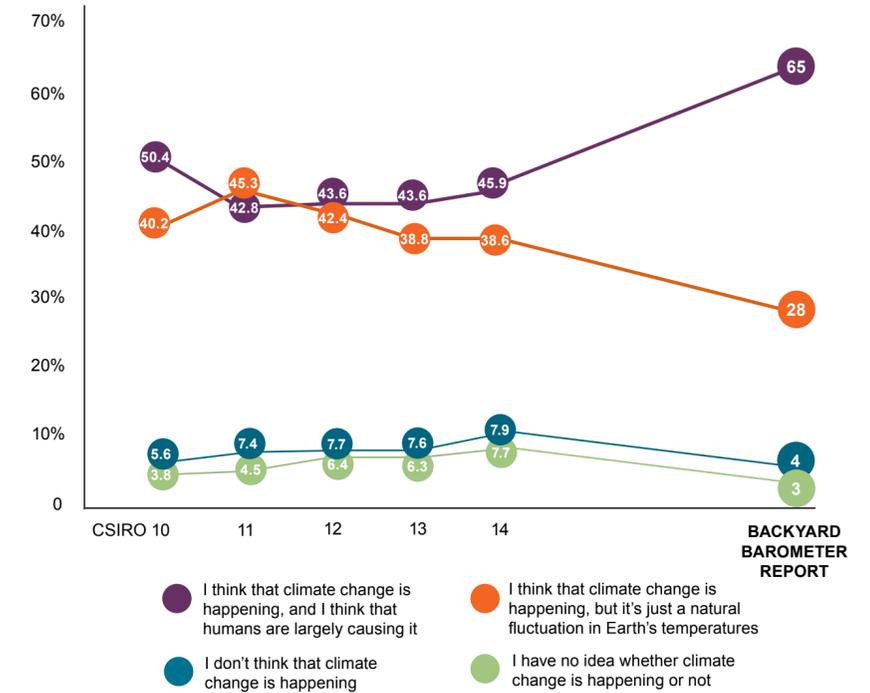
Solar is clearly the preferred energy source for Australians, nominated as the number one choice by 58%. Compared to Climate of the Nation historical data, this is back to previous peaks last seen in 2013 and 2014. Only 4% of Australians chose coal as their preferred energy source and 3% chose gas.

52% of Australians say 'the federal government should not allow new coal mines', more than double the 22% who disagree with this statement.

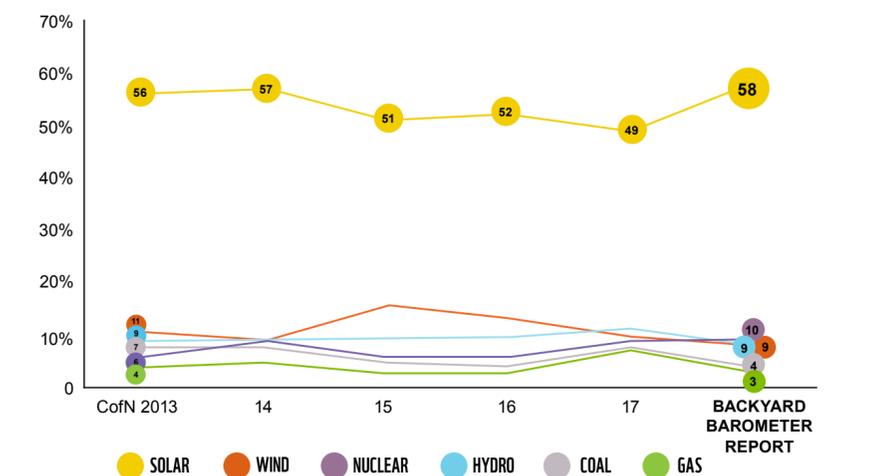
Australia should be a world leader in finding solutions for climate change



Which of the following best describes your thoughts on climate change?



Preferred energy source



Environmental Actions



Backyard Barometer also investigated what types of individual action Australians are taking for the environment.

Recycling and composting is now commonplace, with 86% of Australians saying they regularly recycle/compost. 66% say they have reduced water usage and 53% say they have switched to environment-friendly products.

Three-quarters of Australians have visited a national park or nature reserve in the last two years, and over half (57%) have planted a native plant in their garden.

Looking ahead, switching to renewable energy (20%) and installing solar (19%) ranked as the top two environmental actions Australians are likely to start doing in the 'near future'.

Across the generations

Backyard Barometer reveals some interesting dividing lines between younger and older Australians.

Younger Australians have stronger and clearer views on climate change. 75% of 18 to 24-year-olds say climate change is happening and humans are largely causing it, compared to 39% of 65+ Australians.

18 to 24-year-olds also have strong views that we should have more national parks (49% strongly agree, compared to 23% of Australians over 65). Similarly, 57% of 18 to 24-year-olds strongly agree 'our oceans and marine life are suffering and we need to do more to protect them', compared to 38% of Australians over 65.

However, when it comes to certain environmental actions and attitudes, older Australians are one step ahead. 72% of Australians over 65 say they have 'reduced the amount of gas and/or electricity I use around the house', compared to 58% of 18 to 24-year-olds. And 90% of Australians over 65 say 'I recycle/compost as much household waste as possible', compared to 77% of 18 to 24-year-olds.

And finally, on the deeper question of 'at heart, I'm an environmentalist', 69% of Australians over 65 say they feel that way, compared to 51% of 18 to 24-year-olds.

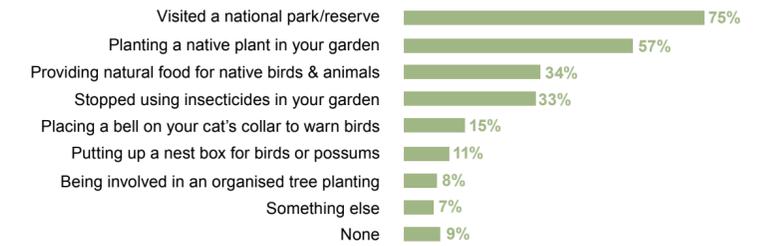
Younger and older Australians



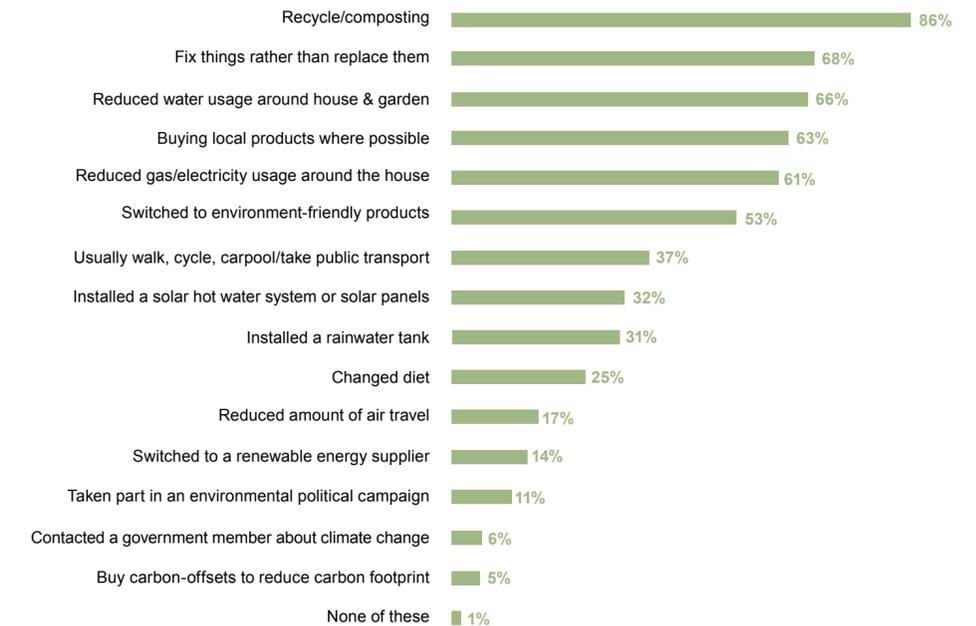
Yes, climate change is happening	95%	79%
Climate change is happening & 'humans are largely causing it'	75%	57%
I think that climate change is happening, but it's just a natural fluctuation in Earth's temperatures	21%	39%
Strongly agree we should have more national parks	49%	23%
Strongly agree our oceans and marine life are suffering and we need to do more to protect them	57%	38%
Reduced the amount of gas and/or electricity I use around the house	58%	72%
I recycle/compost as much household waste as possible	77%	90%
Say 'at heart I'm an environmentalist'	51%	69%



Nature related activities undertaken



Actions taken regularly to help the environment





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WWF is one of the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organisations, with over five million supporters and a global network active in more than 100 countries.

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting pollution reduction and wasteful consumption. We do this in accordance with our values: to act with integrity and to be knowledgeable, optimistic, determined and engaging.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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