

Gauging The Climate: What motivates adults in Western Sydney to take actions that help mitigate climate change?

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This research sought to identify the motivations of adults when habitually undertaking actions that result in reduced carbon emissions compared with likely alternative actions. The study was conducted in the outer western suburbs of Australia's largest city, Sydney, with the aim of developing policy recommendations to create better outcomes for climate change mitigation strategies. There is considerable international literature on the motivations of people adopting pro-environmental behaviours but there is little rigorous Australian research published on this topic. Current literature indicates that Australians on lower incomes have smaller 'carbon footprints' than those on higher incomes. The adoption of pro-environmental behaviour is not necessarily the result of pro-environmental attitudes and may be motivated by other aims. Many care about the environment but it is not a high priority for them, so pro-environmental behaviour is increased when relevant systems are convenient and easy to use. Additionally, behaviour changes are increased through planning the desired actions. The research used a combination of methods. In a process adapted from the Thurstone scale (1928) and Delphi techniques and influenced by ecological behaviour scales (eg Kaiser, Oerke & Bogner 2007), a group of sustainability professionals listed everyday actions that assist to minimize carbon emissions. On the assumption that more difficult actions would be undertaken only by those who were more committed to mitigating climate change, 20 actions were ranked from the easiest, *hanging clothes out to dry instead of using the dryer* to the action considered to require the most effort, *choosing not to run a car*. The resulting Climate Action Scale became the basis for a

survey questionnaire. Results from the survey of 292 Western Sydney residents enabled the Climate Action Scale actions to be re-ranked to match the behaviours reported by respondents. For example, the most commonly reported action (therefore arguably the easiest) was *regular use of the household recycling bin*. Qualitative data collected during the survey process showed that the top five motivations for undertaking the actions were saving money; pro-environmental attitude; saving energy or fuel; convenience of the action; and mitigating climate change. Respondents reported the motivation of 'saving money' three times more frequently than any other motivation for taking an action, and six times more frequently than 'mitigating climate change'. Additional in-depth interviews supported these findings. Therefore, the research focus was revised from why people take action **to** mitigate climate change, to why they take actions **that** mitigate climate change. While the findings are not surprising, they provide evidence that strategies which better align with people's broader motivations are more likely to be effective. Recommendations for federal, state and local governments include a carbon price signal and cheaper, easier pathways for householders and businesses to become energy efficient and opt for renewable energy.

References

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