



Western Alliance for  
Greenhouse Action



# Communities in the WAGA Region: Perceptions and Attitudes towards Climate Change

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## Table of Contents

Section	Page Number
Summary	2
1. Aim of the Assessment	4
2. Method and scope of the assessment	4
2.1 Literature Survey	4
2.2 Scope of community sectors	5
2.3 Constraints of the studies	5
3. Studies in the WAGA Region	7
3.1 Hobsons Bay City Council, 2011	7
3.2 Wyndham City Council, 2013-2014	9
3.3 Maribyrnong City Council, 2013	10
3.4 Brimbank City Council, 2013	11
3.5 Moorabool Shire Council, 2011	11
3.6 Other surveys conducted in the WAGA region	12
4. Broader Victorian and National Studies	13
4.1 Sustainability Victoria, 2010	13
4.2 CSIRO, 2014	14
4.3 Lowy Institute, 2014	16
4.4 The Climate Institute, 2013	17
4.5 NCCARF, 2013	18
5. Observations	18
6. Authorship and a recommendation about updating the assessment	22

## Summary

This report describes an assessment of contemporary perceptions and attitudes towards climate change among people in the WAGA region. It is based on a literature survey of community consultation, primarily conducted by the WAGA councils within their own municipalities and supplemented by broader studies. It covers the views of both residents and businesses. The information will be used to guide stakeholder engagement for climate change programs.

A general community narrative about climate change is evident in the region, despite the diversity of its population. There is consensus that climate change is occurring and causing impacts now, that it is caused by humans, and that everyone, including individuals, businesses and government, should be involved in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While climate change is not often acknowledged as an important local issue, related environmental issues are of concern to local communities. Of these issues, water shortage is the most concerning; other significant issues include waste, parks, gardens and open space, growth and development, and transport. Local government is specifically acknowledged as having a role in addressing climate change, and that role includes regulation as well as information-provision. Cost is the greatest barrier to action, but financial incentives are less necessary as understanding increases.

Most of these views are not peculiar to the WAGA region but are representative of views across Australia.

The report is set out as follows:

- 1. Aim of the assessment**, containing a brief description of the purposes of the research.
- 2. Method and scope of the assessment**, which details the limitations of the research, including how and why they are important. While the studies assessed are useful to guide stakeholder engagement programs, they do not contain definitive statements about what people think and should therefore only be used with caution if at all to guide advocacy campaigns.
- 3. Studies in the WAGA region**, which summarises each of the relevant local studies in turn. Of these, a study conducted by Hobsons Bay in 2011 is the most direct and comprehensive. Most of the other local studies are annual satisfaction surveys, which only indirectly address climate change views, if at all.
- 4. Broader Victorian and national studies**, summarising a number of other studies to supplement and confirming the results of the local studies.
- 5. Observations**. This section lists suppositions that can be drawn from the studies.
- 6. Authorship and a recommendation about updating the assessment**. This section acknowledges that the assessment currently represents the views of the author and makes a case

for it to be regularly updated with input from WAGA members.

## 1. Aim of the Assessment

This assessment is designed to provide an understanding of community attitudes and perceptions to guide stakeholder engagement for climate change programs by WAGA and its member councils. It will be used to:

- Gain insights into how to communicate with communities in relation to programs to address mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, which will be useful for both regional and municipal programs
- Contribute directly to plans to implement programs recommended by Low Carbon West.

Low Carbon West, the strategy for transition to a low carbon economy in the WAGA region, is one of WAGA's main projects. This is a plan for collaborative action between WAGA councils (in some cases with assistance from other government agencies) and community and business stakeholders. Programs recommended by Low Carbon West will rely for their effectiveness on those stakeholders promoting action in the community, enabling and supporting government action, and making efforts to reduce their own greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Accordingly, stakeholder engagement will be an essential component of the programs.

## 2. Method and Scope of the Assessment

### 2.1 Literature Survey

The assessment is based on a literature survey of existing studies that have been determined to be useful and relevant according to the following criteria:

- They provide information through direct consultation with residents (and, in some surveys, businesses) about their views on climate change.
- The consultation has been conducted in the WAGA municipalities, where possible. This approach takes advantage of and adds value to community consultation already undertaken by WAGA councils, but more importantly it ensures that local or regional tendencies are captured. The local studies are benchmarked against broader Victorian and national studies that still fulfil other relevance criteria, particularly statistical validity, in order to reveal any regional peculiarities but, more importantly, to fill gaps in the local studies and ensure that the overall assessment is based on reliable information.
- The consultation is as recent as possible to take into account that attitudes and perceptions change quickly if not significantly in this area, as annual surveys such as the Australia-wide Lowy Institute Poll show (see Section 4.3 below).

## 2.2 Scope of community sectors

The assessment separately describes views from residents/households and businesses. A sectoral breakdown of the region's GHG emissions confirms that they are generated by households (35% by a combination of residential buildings and residential transport) but to an even greater extent by businesses (46% by non-residential buildings) (AECOM/Arup, April 2014, Low Carbon West: Baseline Emissions for 2012 and 2020). It is obvious that residential and business sectors contribute to and are impacted by climate change in different ways, so they require distinct projects and may therefore also require distinct engagement strategies. One of the most comprehensive and relevant studies considered in this assessment is based on consultation in Hobsons Bay, which specifically surveyed small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), on the basis that they have a relatively strong relationship with local government and contribute significantly to the region's carbon footprint, unlike larger businesses, which tend mainly to be influenced by state and federal governments. This assessment considers the views of both SMEs and larger businesses.

Many of the studies in the assessment highlighted 'young people' as a separate segment. The Hobsons Bay study considered the views of randomly selected adult residents but also included interviews with two age-specific focus groups: residents aged under 45 years, and residents aged 15-17 years. This study provides evidence that engagement strategies should target young people, particularly 15-17 as a particular group, based on the character of young people's attitudes and culture. Broader national and state-based studies confirm that age is a factor in people's attitudes towards climate change.

Despite some differences between the views of these various segments, it is also important to note that their views on climate change do not differ significantly, or at all on certain related issues.

## 2.3 Constraints of the studies

### **Statistical reliability:**

Some of the studies assessed provide results that are statistically reliable; that is, able to be generalised with some confidence to the whole population from which the sample was taken, based on suitable respondents' samples and consultation methods. The reliability may be high but is rarely certain, even in the case of national surveys; that is, the results are probably rather than definitely representative. This is due to the exponential difficulty and consequent expense involved in producing statistically certain results. In other words, it is generally not cost-effective to attempt certainty. Probability is still useful, however, for the purpose of designing engagement strategies. Of the local studies considered in this assessment, the Hobsons Bay study of community attitudes and perceptions on climate change has high statistical reliability, as do the annual satisfaction surveys

considered from other WAGA councils.

The Hobsons Bay study has a strong advantage in that it directly and comprehensively addressed views on climate change; that is, the study's findings about those views are based on direct answers that were measured against answers to a wide range of closely related questions in the same study. On the whole the other councils' annual satisfaction surveys did not address climate change directly, so conclusions about views on that issue must be implied from those studies. An exception is the Maribyrnong study, which did include a small number of questions that directly solicited views on climate change.

Studies that do not attempt statistical reliability may nevertheless provide insights into possible trends in community views. The Wyndham study considered here is in that category. Respondents to the Wyndham survey were a relatively small number of people (less than 200) attending council events or accessing the council's website, who answered direct questions about their views on sustainability and climate change. The answers fall into trends and reveal information about views and practices that exist in at least a part of the community in the WAGA region.

The local studies mainly considered here cover five of the eight WAGA municipalities: Hobsons Bay, Wyndham, Maribyrnong, Brimbank and Moorabool. While they do not cover the whole region, they do include responses from a range of rural, peri-urban, inner city, established and growth suburbs. (Two other local studies, from Greater Geelong and Moonee Valley, are relevant and mentioned in this assessment. They are, however, nine and seven years' old respectively, so it cannot be confidently asserted that they reflect current views.) It should also be noted that the results of the local studies are in fact confirmed by the broader studies that have strong statistical reliability.

Statistically probable results, as well as the useful insights gained from studies such as the Wyndham survey, can be confidently used to guide the design of programs to encourage community involvement in climate change programs. They cannot, however, be used to make definitive statements about what people think. Accordingly, this assessment should be used with caution as evidence for advocacy campaigns.

### **Local variability:**

The national and state-based studies show that locality does not play a significant role in influencing community attitudes about climate change. Nevertheless the local studies reveal some differences, mainly in response to questions about local rather than general issues, which may be useful to take into account in programs targeting particular areas in the region.

The differences may be based on the locality of the respondents, such as type of housing, type of infrastructure available in the locality, geography and habitat of the locality (e.g. coastal, built-up, vulnerability to particular climate change impacts such as sea-level rise), mix of housing and industry, relationship of the locality to Melbourne (e.g. inner city, suburban, peri-urban, rural, and residents in and close to Greater Geelong have a particular relationship to the city of Geelong), and other local municipal issues. Some differences will also be due to the different characteristics of the local population; for example, their socio-economic status and cultural background.

This assessment only notes the differences without speculating about reasons, as this factor was not explored in the studies.

### **Timing of the studies:**

All the studies were undertaken at a 'point in time'. The most recent information obviously has the most currency, but factors that dominated at the time of each survey may also have influenced (that is, 'spiked') responses. For example, the Hobsons Bay's study was conducted in the lead-up to the introduction of carbon pricing, with much uncertain speculation about its effect on consumers, which may have influenced short-term opinions. The Victoria-wide study by Sustainability Victoria may be similarly biased by the fact that it was conducted just as a long-term drought was ending across the state.

## **3. Studies in the WAGA Region**

Summaries of relevant findings from each of the local studies are given below.

### **3.1 Hobsons Bay City Council, 2011, Community Consultation Report: Community perceptions and attitudes towards human-induced climate change and greenhouse gas mitigation**

#### **Background:**

This is a comprehensive study of Hobson Bay residents' values, attitudes and perceptions to climate change, mitigation of GHG emissions, and their council's role in these issues. As already mentioned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and young people (under 45s and 15-17 year-olds) were included as distinct segments in the study. It was conducted between May and June 2011, using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, including a representative telephone survey of all residents aged over 18 years. The purpose of the study was to inform development of the council's Community Greenhouse Strategy.

## **Findings:**

### ***Views on the importance of climate change, and beliefs about whether it is occurring and its causes***

- Most Hobsons Bay residents believe climate change is happening, regardless of the cause.
- Most believe climate change has a combination of human-induced and natural causes.
- Pollution by industry, burning fossil fuels and overusing electricity were highlighted as the main causes of climate change.
- More than any other age group, 45-54 year-olds are unaware about climate change issues.

### ***Knowledge about climate change: how to educate, engage and promote***

- Education was mentioned frequently as necessary to inform and encourage the community, and two-thirds of residents are interested in learning more about climate change. Promotion of council programs was seen as useful. Using ordinary language rather than rhetoric and jargon was highlighted as a way to explain information and engage people.

### ***How to address climate change***

- Using solar power was the most commonly mentioned way to reduce impacts. Minimising energy and water use and avoiding driving were also frequently mentioned as ways residents would respond or consider responding to climate change.
- A common theme was that the real motivation to change is the perceived benefit, with cost seen as the biggest barrier and most actions leading to potential money savings. Incentives were seen as important enablers of action.

### ***Governments' (including councils') roles in addressing climate change***

- All groups, including SMEs, highlighted the view that government has an important role in addressing climate change; for instance, providing incentives, raising awareness and imposing restrictions. Two-thirds of residents said they were in favour of businesses paying for their pollution.
- Less than half (two in five) residents said they thought council was a trustworthy source of information about climate change.

### ***Views of young people (aged 15-17 years)***

- This group agreed that climate change is human-caused and made comments such as 'Nothing else could have done it except us', and 'People's lifestyles are killing the planet.' They were not optimistic that climate change would be solved.
- To reduce impacts, the group suggested water tanks, using renewable energy, better education, more public transport and voting green. They also suggested compulsory involvement in actions to address climate change, including council limitations on people's energy use and environmental regulation in building permits.
- Common themes raised were education and information, particularly the value of images and



visual information. Participants said they did not learn much about climate change at school.

- Barriers mentioned included scientific jargon.
- The entire group said that climate change should be in the top three issues for government action.

### **Views of SMEs**

- SMEs said they would be happy to attend council events.
- In 50% of the businesses interviewed, climate change issues were discussed, but none of those interviewed had any formal policies or guidelines in place.
- Most businesses said they believe that the biggest impact of climate change for them will be increased utility costs (water, gas and electricity).
- They considered that energy and water consumption were the main ways their businesses contributed to climate change.
- All businesses said that they would be interested in implementing actions and activities to address impacts of climate change, but they were inhibited due to costs and budget constraints. They said they still need to make a profit.
- A majority of businesses said they believe that the council plays an important role in responding to climate change. However, the general finding that residents do not tend to trust their council as a source of information about climate change was confirmed in interviews with SMEs.
- They expect government to regulate compliance.

## **3.2 Wyndham City Community Sustainability Survey, 2013-2014**

### **Background:**

This study is a set of written and online responses by mostly Wyndham residents to questions about their perceptions, understanding and attitudes to general and local sustainability issues, including climate change, and their council's role in these issues. The study was conducted between 19 October 2013 and 13 January 2014. A non-probable sample of people responded (173 people, some answering the survey from the council's website, and some at council events, not all Wyndham residents, and only 1% of respondents under 24 years old). Therefore, the results cannot be confidently generalised to the wider community but do provide interesting insights.

### **Findings:**

#### ***Views on the importance of climate change, and beliefs about whether it is occurring and its causes***

- 50% of respondents said that climate change is 'very important', while 30% said it is

'important', and only 4.6% said it is 'not important'.

- Only 32% of Wyndham residents saw climate change as an issue for the local area. (Highest ranked issues for the local area were litter and waste, and growth and development.)

#### ***Knowledge about climate change: how to educate, engage and promote***

- In a ranking of issues you 'would like to know more about', climate change scored lowest, with only 20% of residents wanting to know more. (Highest were growth and development, and habitat and biodiversity loss.)
- 70% of respondents have fair to good understanding of climate change, in their own opinion.

#### ***How to address climate change***

- In a ranking of 'sustainability actions undertaken in the home', insulation ranked highest, then energy and water efficiency measures, and worm farms.
- Cost was seen as the biggest barrier to 'doing more' on sustainability, followed by lack of information and lack of time.

#### ***Governments' (including councils') roles in addressing climate change***

- 63.6% said they believe that the council plays a role in responding to climate change. (24% were 'not sure'.)
- But, 73% said they believe that it is the council's responsibility to:
  - Educate and provide information about climate change
  - Mitigate and set an example
  - Adapt and prepare the municipality for current and future risks.
- On the question of who residents trust when seeking advice on local environmental issues, 'local council' gained the highest positive response, with 64%, followed by Sustainability Victoria with 50%.

### **3.3 Maribyrnong City Council, 2013, Annual Community Survey**

#### **Background:**

This study was conducted by Metropolis Research between August and September 2013, using direct interviews with a representative sample of Maribyrnong residents to gain statistically valid information about their satisfaction with a broad range of council services, including top issues for council, such as gaming, traffic issues, governance, leadership and customer service.

Environmental and climate change responsibility were included in the survey but were not main themes.

#### **Findings:**

##### ***Views on the importance of climate change, and beliefs about whether it is occurring and***

### ***its causes***

- Only 1.8% of residents said 'Environment, conservation and climate change' should be a 'top issue' for their council, from a list of 45 issues. This issue rated highest in 2009 (4.8%). 7.4% of residents rates 'parks gardens and open space' as a 'top issue'.

### ***Governments' (including councils') roles in addressing climate change***

- In the theme of 'satisfaction with governance and accountability', residents ranked 'meeting environmental responsibility' (which did not include climate change) as 7.28 out of 10, equating to 'somewhat satisfied' (very satisfied being 8-10 out of 10). The ranking has improved for the fourth consecutive year and has increased by 9.5% since 2009.

## **3.4 Brimbank City Council, 2013, Community Satisfaction Survey**

### **Background:**

This study was conducted in February and March 2013 using statistically reliable interviews with a representative sample of Brimbank residents. Like the Maribyrnong study, this one only indirectly examined environmental issues. It did not examine climate change views at all.

### **Findings:**

#### ***Governments' (including councils') roles in addressing climate change***

- 'Environmental sustainability' is among a number of service areas where residents believe that the importance of the issue significantly exceeds their council's performance on it.
- Out of 21 service areas listed, environment rated 12th for importance. The three most important areas were emergency and disaster management, elderly support services, and local streets and footpaths.

## **3.5 Moorabool Shire Council, 2011, Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey**

### **Background:**

This study, now three years old, was conducted by Wallis Consulting Group with a representative sample of residents, focusing on a number of service areas that did not include environment or climate change.

### **Findings:**

#### ***Governments' (including councils') roles in addressing climate change***

- Although there were no direct questions about residents' views on environment as a service area, 13% of respondents said that their council needs to take better account of

environmental issues when improving on town planning policy and approvals.

### 3.6 Other surveys conducted in the WAGA region

Councils regularly conduct community satisfaction surveys, but they do not always cover environment and sustainability, let alone climate change, themes in their questions. The results of these surveys are still useful as they reveal issues of importance to residents, which can be taken into account in devising engagement strategies on climate change issues. The following observation from 'Governing Melbourne', Metropolis Research's general municipal survey is of particular relevance:

- The finding in Maribyrnong's Annual Community Survey, that residents are 'somewhat satisfied' that their council is meeting its environmental responsibility, is almost identical for metropolitan Melbourne (7.16) and overall for six western region councils (Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham) (7.12). The satisfaction measure is, however, based on a consideration of parks, gardens and open spaces, street trees and some other similar services and facilities, which are consistently rated highly by the community.

Two additional regional studies exist that are relevant and statistically reliable. They are, however, too old to be considered accurate reflections of current views. Nevertheless, they confirm that there is a base of significant community interest in local environmental issues in the region and that residents think their council should address them. Those studies are:

- Moonee Valley City Council, 2007, Community Research Project (conducted by Metropolis Research). This study found strong community sentiment that there is a role for local government in addressing environmental issues, particularly in relation to community education. (The researchers stated that this result was confirmed across metropolitan Melbourne, not just in Moonee Valley.) 'Environment and conservation' were increasingly important in the community, although 'traffic management' was still seen as the most important issue for the council to address.
- City of Greater Geelong, 2005, Annual Community Survey (conducted by Metropolis Research). Respondents rated the importance of protection and enhancement of the local environment at 8.63 out of 10. In Bellarine, this service was rated at 9.03, which is comparatively high.

## 4. Broader Victorian and National Studies

Summaries are given below of studies that include but cover a larger area than the WAGA region.

These studies also directly address climate change views, surveyed some particular issues that were not considered in the local studies, and have strong statistical reliability. All the studies are national but one, which is state-based. The latter study is relatively old, dating from 2010, but it is the most recent relevant Victoria-wide study. No other studies were found that are more relevant, more reliable or cover a smaller area that still includes the WAGA region.

#### 4.1 Sustainability Victoria, 2010, Green Light Report

##### **Background:**

Changes in environmental attitudes, behaviours and household features were explored through randomly sampled telephone surveys of 2,160 Victorians aged 15 years and over, plus 3,288 interviews conducted in 15 local government areas (LGAs).

The study is not particularly recent and has not been repeated. It is, however, the most recent relevant Victoria-wide study and includes observations about differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan LGAs. Considering that the study was undertaken towards the end of a prolonged drought in Victoria, and that there have also been significant changes to national and state climate change policies and increasing public discourse about them since 2010, it could be expected that community views have changed somewhat in 2014, at least in relation to their governments' roles. This is supported by the Lowy Institute Poll 2014 (see Section 4.3 below) but not by CSIRO's 2014 national survey (see Section 4.2 below), which shows that Australians' views have not changed significantly since 2010.

##### **Findings:**

###### ***Views on the importance of climate change, and beliefs about whether it is occurring and its causes***

- 80% of Victorians have some degree of concern about the environment.
- 91% said they believe that the climate is changing, and 71% said they believe that humans are impacting on this change.
- Water supply is the most important environmental issue (for 39% of Victorians), but climate change is the next most important (for 18% of Victorians). People aged 35 to 54 years were more likely to mention lack of water. Younger people and students were most likely to mention a climate change issue.
- Results were compared across LGAs, but the researchers stated: 'While some differences in environmental attitudes and beliefs were evident, in the main these were not particularly large, nor consistent for any specific LGA or group of LGAs.' That said, residents sampled

from Brimbank were among those less likely to think that there is something they could do about the environment as individuals or to sacrifice home comforts for energy efficiency.

***Knowledge of climate change: Education, engagement, promotion***

- 20% felt very well informed when it comes to climate change, while 56% felt fairly well informed.

***How to address climate change***

- 85% felt they can do something about the environment, and 74% said they believed that it is worth doing something even if others do not.
- People from metropolitan Melbourne tend to have different household sustainability practices to those in regional Victoria. For instance, regional Victorians are more likely to have rainwater tanks and insulation, and city Victorians are more likely to have low-flow showerheads and heating with a thermostat.

***Governments' (including councils') roles in addressing climate change***

- To understand Victorians' current mindset, all respondents were initially asked what they thought were the most important issues for attention by the Victorian Government. Health and hospitals, education and transport ranked as more important issues than the environment.
- 12% listed an environmental issue as the most important concern for the Victorian Government's attention. The top ranking environmental issues were water-related (49%) (compared to 55% in 2009) and climate change (18%) (compared to 26% in 2009).
- Most in the community thought that the Victorian Government should consider environmental concerns when making decisions on matters like the economy and employment. This view was more commonly held by people with children in their household, those in houses built before 1990, and those under the age of 55 years. Most also agree that the Government should regulate to reduce energy and water use.

## 4.2 CSIRO, 2014, Fourth annual survey of Australian attitudes to Climate Change

**Background:**

This study is based on a recent comprehensive survey of 5,219 Australians specifically in relation to their responses to climate change.

**Findings:**

***Views on the importance of climate change, and beliefs about whether it is occurring and its causes***

- Climate change ranked low compared to other concerns (14 out of 16) and even low

compared to other environmental concerns (7 out of 8); however, the natural environment ranked 10 out of 16, and water ranked 9 out of 16 out of other concerns.

- The top five concerns were health, cost of living, employment, education and the Australian economy.
- Environmental concerns were ranked in the following order: water shortages, pollution, water quality, drought, deforestation, household waste, climate change, salinity.
- Attitudes to climate change and climate-relevant behaviours have remained relatively stable since 2010.
- More than 80% of Australians believe that climate change is happening, and on average they estimate that human activity accounts for about 62% of changes to climate.
- Respondents said they believe that their region has become hotter since the 1990s and would be hotter in 20-40 years' time. The majority of respondents thought their region had become wetter since the 1990s but would get drier in 20-40 years' time. Only 20-30% of respondents said they believe that rainfall and temperature have remained and would remain stable in their region.

#### ***Knowledge of climate change: Education, engagement, promotion***

- Those who said they do not believe that climate change is occurring (less than 8%) were inaccurate when predicting the views of other Australians, estimating that 50% of others would hold the same view. This contributes to the misconception of 90% of Australians who think they do at least as much as other Australians to address climate change (and 40% think they do more).
- Since the last annual survey, Australians are less hopeful, excited and angry about climate change but feel more guilty and ashamed.

#### ***How to address climate change***

- People are slightly more positive about the potential outcomes of responding to climate change in 2014.
- Reasons for participating in pro-environmental behaviours:
  - 43%: financial.
  - 10%: environmental.
  - 21%: combination of financial and environmental.
- When split into low and high engagement respondents, 56% of low engagement respondents gave 'financial' as their motivation for participation, whereas only 31% of high engagement respondents gave 'financial' as their motivation.
- The highest ranked initiative was increased government investment in renewable energy. The middle ranked initiative was introducing a tax for industries that emit high levels of greenhouse gas emissions. Nuclear power received very little support.

### ***Governments' (including councils') roles in addressing climate change***

- People are slightly more trusting of a range of agencies to tell them the truth about climate change, although overall trust levels remain modest. Of 13 different organisations listed, university scientists, and friends and family, remain the most trusted sources of information about climate change, followed by environmental groups' scientists, and environmental organisations. Oil companies are least trusted, but car companies and government are also low on the list. There has been a small but statistically significant increase in trust in government over time.
- On the question of responsibility for climate change, local government ranked 6 out of 8 for causing climate change, with 1 being 'the most responsible', and 7 out of 8 as being responsible for addressing climate change. Top of the list for causing climate change was big polluting companies followed by multi-nationals, then the federal government. At the bottom was 'the individual'.

### **4.3 Lowy Institute Poll, 2014**

#### **Background:**

This study reports the results of a nationally representative survey of 1,000 Australian adults in February 2014 on a broad range of issues including climate change.

#### **Findings:**

##### ***Views on the importance of climate change, and beliefs about whether it is occurring and its causes***

- 'After a high point in 2006, successive Polls revealed a steadily declining concern about climate change. But 2014 marks the second consecutive year that we have seen a rise in Australians' concerns about climate change. The trend has turned around.'
- Concern about climate change differs across age groups. Australians under 45 years are more likely to regard it as 'a serious and pressing problem' (51%) compared with 40% of those 45 years and older.
- Education is also a factor, with only 37% of those with Year 11 or less education saying climate change is a 'most serious' problem, compared with 50% of those with Year 12 or higher education.

##### ***Governments' (including councils') roles in addressing climate change***

- Most Australians (63%) say that the Australian government 'should be taking a leadership role on reducing emissions'.



#### 4.4 The Climate Institute, 2013, Climate of the Nation: Australian Attitudes on Climate Change

##### **Background:**

This study is based on a recent national online survey of 1,009 Australians, plus associated focus groups. The survey explored different questions about climate change to the CSIRO study and particularly asked people to consider possible solutions.

##### **Findings:**

###### ***Views on the importance of climate change, and beliefs about whether it is occurring and its causes***

- Two-thirds of Australians believe that the climate is changing.
- 87% believe both that humans are at least in part to blame and that we are already experiencing climate impacts in Australia.
- Only 11% of those who agree climate change is occurring think it is caused solely by natural cycles.

###### ***How to address climate change***

- A growing majority of Australians think that our country should be a leader in finding climate solutions.
- 87% placed solar energy within their top three preferred energy options. Wind was the second most preferred option with 67%. Coal and nuclear are rated lowest.
- 63% think that responding to climate change presents a unique economic opportunity for the development and sale of renewable energy. Also, 71% see new jobs and investment in clean energy resulting from Australia acting on climate change, with 64% of Coalition voters sharing this view.
- People don't think that industry and the media are doing a good job at addressing climate change, giving them net performance approval ratings of -17% and -20% respectively, broadly similar to last year, while the Australian Government improved from -6% to -1%.

###### ***Governments' (including councils') roles in addressing climate change***

- Voters are uninspired and unconvinced by Australia's current climate action policy and do not see wholesale repeal of carbon pricing and lack of action on climate change as a credible strategy for Australia in the future.
- More Australians are in favour of keeping some form of carbon pricing or trading scheme (46%) than are in favour of abolishing it or seeing the coalition replace it with their Direct Action plan (36%). The research does support a change to the carbon pricing policy, but the change requires a more effective policy, not abolishing carbon pricing altogether. 'Opposition to carbon pricing has dropped significantly, but that's not to say the policy is popular or

understood. Support remains soft, but it rises to a majority when people understand the policy correctly, that is that all of the revenue raised from it goes to support households and industry and is invested in renewable energy.'

- Only 6-8% of Australians believe that local, state or federal government should take no action.

#### 4.5 National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF), 2013, Climate Change Adaptation in the Board Room

##### **Background:**

This project used non-traditional research methods, such as private interviews and boardroom discussions with the researchers' existing networks, to gather 'soft' data on businesses' views, actions and ability to adapt to climate change. Participants were company executives from a range of large domestic and multi-national companies. The findings are based on the views of the participants.

##### **Findings:**

- The Australian Government expects that the private sector will adapt with little or no incentive provided.
- A multiplicity of policy reform may be necessary, but crafting and implementing it is likely to remain beyond the capability of the Australian Public Service (APS) or individual governments.
- Highly sophisticated mining, gas and some Asian-owned technology companies are leading the way with many opportunities missed by Australian companies.

## 5. Observations

This section lists some observations that can be drawn from the studies about community attitudes and perceptions in the WAGA region in relation to climate change issues. A comparison of the local and broader studies supports the proposition that, in general, these views are not peculiar to the region but are in fact representative of views across Australia. Where regional variability is evident, this is pointed out.

### ***Views on the importance of climate change, and beliefs about whether it is occurring and its causes***

- There is a strong general consensus in the community that climate change is occurring and that it is at least partly caused by humans. (This can be confidently asserted, as it is revealed in the local studies and is confirmed across Victoria and indeed Australia.) Most people also say that

we are currently experiencing the changes in the form of temperature rises and different rainfall patterns.

- People who believe that change is occurring also mainly believe the causes are pollution by industry, burning fossil fuels and overusing electricity (as detailed in the Hobsons Bay study).
- Environment and climate change do not rank in most people's top concerns. As an environmental concern, climate change does not rank as high as other concerns such as water and waste. (See, however, the views of young people, below.)
- There is evidence (e.g. from the Wyndham study but also revealed in broader studies) that, while residents may view climate change as important, they do not tend to see it as an issue of local importance, except where they are vulnerable to sea level rise. On the other hand, the Hobsons Bay study revealed that people may recognise local businesses and industrial activity (in this case, trucks, Mobil, Shell and a truck facility In Spotswood) as key polluters.
- Water shortage is consistently ranked high or highest in a list of environmental concerns (even since the most recent Victorian drought).
- Local environmental issues of concern may differ significantly depending on the municipality and even suburb. Top concerns for Wyndham residents include waste, and growth and development. Maribyrnong residents are particularly concerned about their parks and gardens. Brimbank residents are particularly concerned about local streets and footpaths.
- There is not much difference between people's level of concern based on their locality, although some local government areas and suburbs show relatively higher concern (e.g. Bellarine) or lower concern (e.g. Brimbank). There is a difference between metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria in relation to household actions undertaken for sustainability.
- People's views on the importance of climate change have not changed significantly since 2010, but it appears that concern is rising (Lowy Institute Poll).

### ***How to address climate change***

- The most popular measure to address climate change is using renewable energy, particularly solar. This includes household measures (installing solar panels) and government measures (increasing government investment in renewables). Investment in renewable energy is seen as an economic opportunity. Nuclear power is the least popular measure.
- Other measures often mentioned as useful are wind power, insulation, and energy and water efficiency.
- Lack of personal finance is consistently mentioned as the greatest barrier to action for individuals. Accordingly, financial incentives are seen as strong motivators, especially by those who do not have great environmental concern. But lack of information and lack of time are also barriers.

- Most Australians generally do feel at least partly responsible on a personal level for addressing climate change and are becoming more positive about what they can do. However, they also believe that individuals are much less responsible than polluting businesses, and they don't tend to see a connection between climate change and their own purchasing habits.
- Education is revealed to be an important factor. Only 70-75% of people think they understand climate change. Those who are less educated in general are less likely to think climate change is important. There is also significant misunderstanding about climate change amongst people who don't believe it is occurring or believe that it is not important. Those who say it is not occurring inaccurately believe that most Australians agree with them (CSIRO study). Most people do not understand carbon pricing but tend to support it when they do understand.
- Hobsons Bay residents are mostly in favour of education about climate change, although this was not popular amongst Wyndham respondents when compared to other sustainability measures.
- People do not respond well to 'buzz' words such as 'climate change' or what they perceive as scientific jargon.

### ***Governments' (including councils') roles in addressing climate change***

- Environment is rarely ranked amongst issues that people believe are most important for governments to address, and climate change is not ranked high as an environmental issue.
- Concerns consistently mentioned as more important for government include health and hospitals, education, transport and the economy. For local government, although environment usually ranks low, service areas such as emergency and disaster management, parks, gardens and open spaces, street trees, and traffic management/transport rank high. Again, water management ranks relatively high among other environmental issues as an important role for government.
- On the other hand, almost everyone agrees that government, including local government, has a role in addressing climate change; for example, providing incentives, raising awareness, and imposing restrictions on pollution and energy use by households and businesses. Most people are not averse to government regulation in this area. Two-thirds of Hobsons Bay residents say that businesses should pay for pollution.
- The Australian Government is considered to have a greater role in addressing climate change than local government. In fact, a growing majority of Australians think that Australia should be a leader in developing solutions, but local communities are not seen as significant stakeholders in climate change. Australians are not mostly opposed to carbon pricing.
- Local government is specifically acknowledged as having a role; for example, educating and providing information, mitigating emissions and setting an example, taking account of climate

change in planning policies and approvals, and adapting and preparing municipalities for climate risks (as shown by the regional studies from Hobsons Bay, Wyndham and Moorabool).

- People across the WAGA region are not assured that their councils are completely meeting their environmental responsibilities. (Studies for at least six WAGA councils show that residents are only 'somewhat satisfied'.)
- While people do not tend to trust local government - or any government agency - as a source of information about climate change (in Hobsons Bay, only 2 in 5 people trust their council), people may trust their council on matters they perceive as local environmental issues.
- People prefer to trust friends and family on information about climate change.

### ***Young people's views (and age-related differences)***

- There is evidence that young people (aged 15-17 years) and students tend to think of climate change as a top concern, in contrast to adults. The studies also suggest that concern among adults correlates with how young they are.
- According to the Hobsons Bay study, young people (aged 15 to 17 years) agree that climate change is a problem and are not optimistic about solving it. Like the general population, they do see government as having a role in addressing it and are not opposed to compulsory action. They believe better education on the issue would be useful. (The finding that young people think climate change is a serious problem is confirmed in the broader studies.)
- The Hobsons Bay study provides clues about how to engage young people - through images and visual information, without climate change 'jargon'.
- The Hobsons Bay study also showed that people aged 45-54 years are relatively unaware about climate change issues. This is offset by a finding in the Sustainability Victoria study that people aged less than 55 years who also have children tend to think environmental concerns are important.

### ***Views of businesses***

- Like the general population, businesses, including SMEs, tend to agree that government in general has a role in addressing climate change. They know that energy use contributes to the problem and do expect government regulation.
- The NCCARF study of mid-sized and large companies found that businesses think the Australian Government provides them with inadequate incentives to address climate change. They also believe that government may not be capable of the necessary policy reform.
- Australian businesses in the NCCARF study said they believe their overseas counterparts are doing more and better to address climate change.
- SMEs in the Hobsons Bay study said they do not see their council as a trustworthy source of

information about the issue but are happy to attend council events.

- While businesses may discuss climate change, they do not tend to be well-prepared to address it.
- Cost is revealed as the greatest barrier to action, so financial incentives are considered necessary.
- Lack of information and lack of time are also important barriers, as shown particularly for SMEs.

### ***A general narrative about attitudes and perceptions in the WAGA region***

From the specific observations listed above, a general community narrative about climate change can be constructed. In the WAGA region, there is consensus that climate change is occurring and causing impacts now, that it is caused by humans, and that everyone, including individuals, businesses and government, should be involved in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While climate change is not often acknowledged as an important local issue, related environmental issues are of concern to local communities. Of these issues, water shortage is the most concerning; other significant issues include waste, parks, gardens and open space, growth and development, and transport. Local government is specifically acknowledged as having a role in addressing climate change, and that role includes regulation as well as information-provision. Cost is the greatest barrier to action, but financial incentives are less necessary as understanding increases.

### **6. Authorship and a recommendation about updating the assessment**

This report has been authored by Fran Macdonald, WAGA Coordinator. Sam Hunt, a work experience student employed by Wyndham City Council's Department of Environment and Sustainability, contributed valuable background research. Accordingly, the observations in Section 5 above are those of the author, based on the author's judgement about what was important to include or not in the studies assessed. In other words, the assessment is to a significant extent subjective.

It is possible that other readers may have other observations and be able to discern other trends in the data that are not mentioned in the assessment. In order to improve the quality of the assessment, as well as keep it up-to-date, it is therefore recommended that the assessment be regularly updated with input particularly from WAGA members, because they are most experienced in understanding the views of local communities in the region on climate change issues.

