

Public support found in how you pose the question

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"When the costs of reducing Australia's emissions were framed as a foregone-gain, people were willing to reduce Australia's emissions by a greater extent as it was clear that incomes will continue to rise with emission cuts," Dr Hurlstone says. Credit: Louis Vest

Changing the way information about emission reduction costs is communicated as well as sharing information about fellow Australian's policy preferences can increase public support for higher emission cuts, according to recent research.

UWA and UNSW psychologists set out to explore ways to encourage public willingness for climate-mitigation measures considering the low level of [public support](#) to prioritise climate policies.

UWA School of Psychology A/Prof Mark Hurlstone says a major factor

in our resistance to reducing emissions is that we have an inflated perception of the cost, illustrated through the repealed carbon pricing scheme.

"The concerted efforts of vested industries and political groups here to cast doubt on climate science has undoubtedly led many Australian's to erroneously conclude that taking action to reduce emissions is unnecessary," he says.

The researchers tested two interventions to this issue; framing and normative messaging.

Framing theory proposes people's perception of and subsequent choices about information can be manipulated by structuring the message differently.

They randomly assigned 120 participants across an 'actual loss' versus a 'forgone-gain' condition.

In the loss condition, participants were shown the cost to the average Australian income in 2020 under different emission cut options, encouraging them to consider these with reference to their current income level.

For example, "reducing Australia's emissions will cost on average \$1,000 per person in 2020."

Future costs considered

In contrast, the 'forgone-gain' condition revealed the current average income, the expected average income in 2020 with no [emission cuts](#), and the expected average income under different emission cut options.

The cost was thus framed as a slower increase in future incomes, for

example, "reducing Australia's emissions will cause incomes to rise by \$5,000 per person on average in 2020, compared to \$6,000 without emission cuts".

"When the costs of reducing Australia's emissions were framed as a foregone-gain, people were willing to reduce Australia's emissions by a greater extent as it was clear that incomes will continue to rise with emission cuts," Dr Hurlstone says.

Normative messaging, the influence of perceived social norms on people's preferences, was also tested by showing participants information about the emission policy preferences of other Australians

"Providing information about the policy preferences of a peer group [whose] members exhibited a preference for strong emission reductions raised the amount they were prepared to reduce Australia's [emissions](#), compared to a group that received no such information."

A/Prof Hurlstone says both framing and normative messaging can raise support for emission reductions by reducing perceived costliness and increasing consensus.

More information: "The Effect of Framing and Normative Messages in Building Support for Climate Policies" [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0114335](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0114335)

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