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Australians Put Jobs Before Action on Climate Change

Australians see protecting their jobs and strengthening the economy as more important foreign policy goals than tackling climate change according to the 2008 Lowy Institute Poll, to be released tomorrow.

The Poll's findings also indicate that we regard climate-related challenges as the most critical threats to Australia and a slim majority (51%) of Australians are not confident in the government's ability to deal with global warming.

The Poll also reveals that Australians want action on climate change but not if it hits hard on the hip pocket.

Asked how much extra each month they would be willing to pay on their electricity bill to help solve climate change, 53% of Australians were only prepared to pay \$10 per month or less, 19% were prepared to pay \$21 or more.

Last year, 'tackling climate change' tied for first place with 'protecting the jobs of Australian workers' as the most important foreign policy goal (75% of Australians said these were 'very important' goals).

This year 'tackling climate change' dropped from first to equal fifth place (from 75% saying it was 'very important' to 66%).

Lowy Institute Executive Director, Allan Gyngell, said the goal of 'strengthening the Australian economy' underwent the biggest movement since last year, up ten points from sixth to third place (with 70% of Australians saying it was 'very important').

"Concern over economic issues has risen at the expense of the environment," Mr Gyngell said.

"This is one of a number of shifts in public opinion over the past year, which the Poll has revealed," he said.

There was also a drop since 2006 in the number of Australians saying global warming required taking steps now even if this involved significant costs (down from 68% in 2006 to 60% in 2008).

"Looking at perceived threats to Australia though, climate change-related issues are considered the most critical," Mr Gyngell said, with 83% saying the increasing scarcity of water was a critical threat to Australia in the next ten years.

Global warming was the next most critical threat. It tied with international terrorism, which in 2006 ranked as the most critical threat.

The complete Poll will be released at a media conference at 11am on Monday 29 September at the Lowy Institute, 31 Bligh Street, Sydney. It contains new questions covering:

- Australia's reputation under the new Rudd government
- Australian attitudes towards China
- The US presidential election
- Japanese whaling
- Major foreign investment in Australia and
- Uranium exports

The survey also repeats questions from previous Lowy Institute Polls revealing significant shifts in Australian public opinion.

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The Lowy Institute is an independent, non-partisan think tank which researches international political, strategic and economic issues from an Australian perspective.

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