



**REWRITE THE FUTURE: CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS 2010**  
**Hosted by Lighter Footprints in Hawthorn, Melbourne, Australia**  
**18 February 2010**  
**Short Summary Report**

### **Background**

This report is a summary of a community forum held by climate change action group Lighter Footprints on 18 February 2010 in Hawthorn, Melbourne, Australia. The main purpose of the event was to trial a model of community engagement aimed at increasing participants' understanding of climate change, facilitating their contribution to the wider public debate, and encouraging a personal commitment to action. The invited speakers were climate scientist Professor David Karoly and safe climate campaigner Victoria McKenzie-McHarg. Management consultant Rowan McClean facilitated the event. Approximately 80 people participated in the event. The discussions centred around three key themes: climate literacy; available solutions; and the responsibilities of various stakeholders to respond to climate change.

### **Methodology**

Research suggests that local deliberative forums are an effective way of engaging with the community, boosting climate literacy and promoting active participation on the issue of climate change. These types of forums offer an opportunity for discussion and asking questions of experts and stakeholders. This method of engagement is demonstrated to boost participants' confidence in their own ability to contribute to debate; help develop respect for scientists and institutions; build people's capacity for taking action; and assist in achieving consensus on difficult issues as well as support for policy decisions. This approach enables participants to learn about technical aspects of science and solutions as well as considering the social, political, economic and ethical implications of climate change.

### **Findings**

Of the 80 (approx) participants who attended, 47 submitted a workbook with their responses to discussion questions. The majority of reporting participants (65%) were over 50 years of age, and 12% were less than 40 years of age. Of the participants, 51% were male and 49% were female. None identified themselves as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and 10% identified themselves as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. Forty-seven (47%) identified themselves as volunteering or working in the area of climate change.

**Climate literacy:** A large majority of participants felt climate literacy in the community is generally poor to extremely poor (83%). Self-reported climate literacy among the participants was generally considered adequate (38%), or reasonably/very high (36%) possibly reflecting the self-selection of attendees in responding to invitations to the event. Many of those who reported low levels of climate literacy prior to the forum reported considerably higher levels after the event. Many people reported that the chance to have a discussion and analyse the issues was a vital step in engaging the community on the issue and improving climate literacy.

Over 80% of respondents considered it 'extremely important' that people are better informed about climate science. Many participants expressed concerns that a failure to understand climate science and its implications created misunderstanding about the risks of inaction and that poor climate literacy was contributing to a lack of political pressure to respond.

Governments had a role to play in countering misinformation about climate change science, participants said. Informing the public about the latest science on climate change was considered to be a necessary and important government policy initiative. Business also has a role to play, with several calls for greater leadership from all organisations on the issue.

**Solutions:** The majority of participants (68%) considered it is technically possible to reverse the effects of climate change but just over half (51%) held the view that climate change would increase before there is an effective political response. Twenty-one percent of participants held the view that it would not be possible to effectively mitigate climate change because of the difficulty in achieving the necessary global cooperation.

The involvement of government in establishing a price on carbon, regulate greenhouse gas emissions and encourage renewable energy technology was strongly supported. Over 70% identified the deployment of large scale low or zero emissions technology as a priority. An informed community was considered a powerful vehicle for change. The response of community through behaviour change was considered important, with shifts to locally sourced goods and services, changes to diet, and switching to public transport or walking and cycling very popular. There was little support for geo-engineering (6%), with most participants expressing a lack of understanding about what it might offer.

**Responsibilities of government:** Participants in the forum were generally pessimistic about the preparedness of governments to act on climate change. This was largely considered to be linked to a lack of community demand for action. Many people felt governments were more responsive to industry and the fossil fuel lobby than the community. There was disappointment expressed with the performance of both state and federal governments on the issue, while local government was considered to be responding most effectively to date. Greater respect for science and its incorporation into policy-making was also a strong theme, with 27% of respondents expressing the view that education of the community (including parliamentarians) was necessary for informed and valid decision-making in relation to climate change.

**Responsibilities of business:** Respondents overwhelmingly indicated a preference for business to act as a positive role model by addressing the impact of their activities on the environment and reducing their contribution to climate change. Taking responsibility for reducing emissions through shifting to clean energy sources and increasing energy efficiency were identified by 64% of respondents as important priorities for business. Many respondents (34%) also spoke of their desire for business to accept a moral responsibility for contributing to climate change through commercial activities, and to take responsibility for and acknowledge their contribution to emissions.

**Responsibilities of individuals:** Over 65% of responses referred to the need for people to reduce their own carbon footprint by reducing consumption and adopting a sustainable lifestyle by making the consideration of climate impacts implicit in every decision. Reducing energy demand, improving energy efficiency, recycling as much as possible, ethical purchasing, shopping locally, and growing your own food were some of the examples of ways individuals could take action and reduce their own footprint.

*A full report is available via [www.lighterfootprints.org](http://www.lighterfootprints.org) For more information contact: [fiona-armstrong@bigpond.com](mailto:fiona-armstrong@bigpond.com)*