

# Who Cares about the Environment? 2012

**Environmental  
knowledge, attitudes  
and behaviour of the  
people of NSW**

**Seventh triennial survey**





# Overview

- Introduction

- Research design and analysis
- Context
- The 'big picture'

- Findings

- Priorities and attitudes
- Knowledge and views
- Behaviours

} Survey results  
with qualitative  
insights

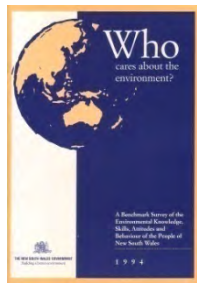
- In summary

- What's next...



# What is it?

- Social research conducted triennially since 1994 – seven full rounds of research (plus an interim in 2007)
- Survey that tracks core questions plus asks new ones
- Includes qualitative component each year (focus groups)



1994



1997



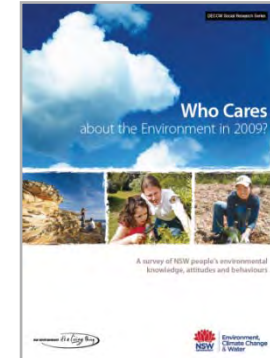
2000



2003



2006



2009



2012



## Why do we do it?

- **UNDERSTAND** - environmental knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in NSW....  
.... current snapshot + track longer term trends
- **DRIVE POLICY AND PROGRAMS** – providing information for all sectors
- **PROMOTE DEBATE** around the social dimension of environmental protection and conservation





# Research design

## Quantitative telephone survey

- 2,006 NSW residents aged 15yrs+; late May – late July 2012
- Average 25min interview
- Sample geographically-stratified by 14 regions across NSW, proportionate to population, with minimum targets for age & gender
- Results post weighted by age and gender in region

## Focus group discussions (qualitative)

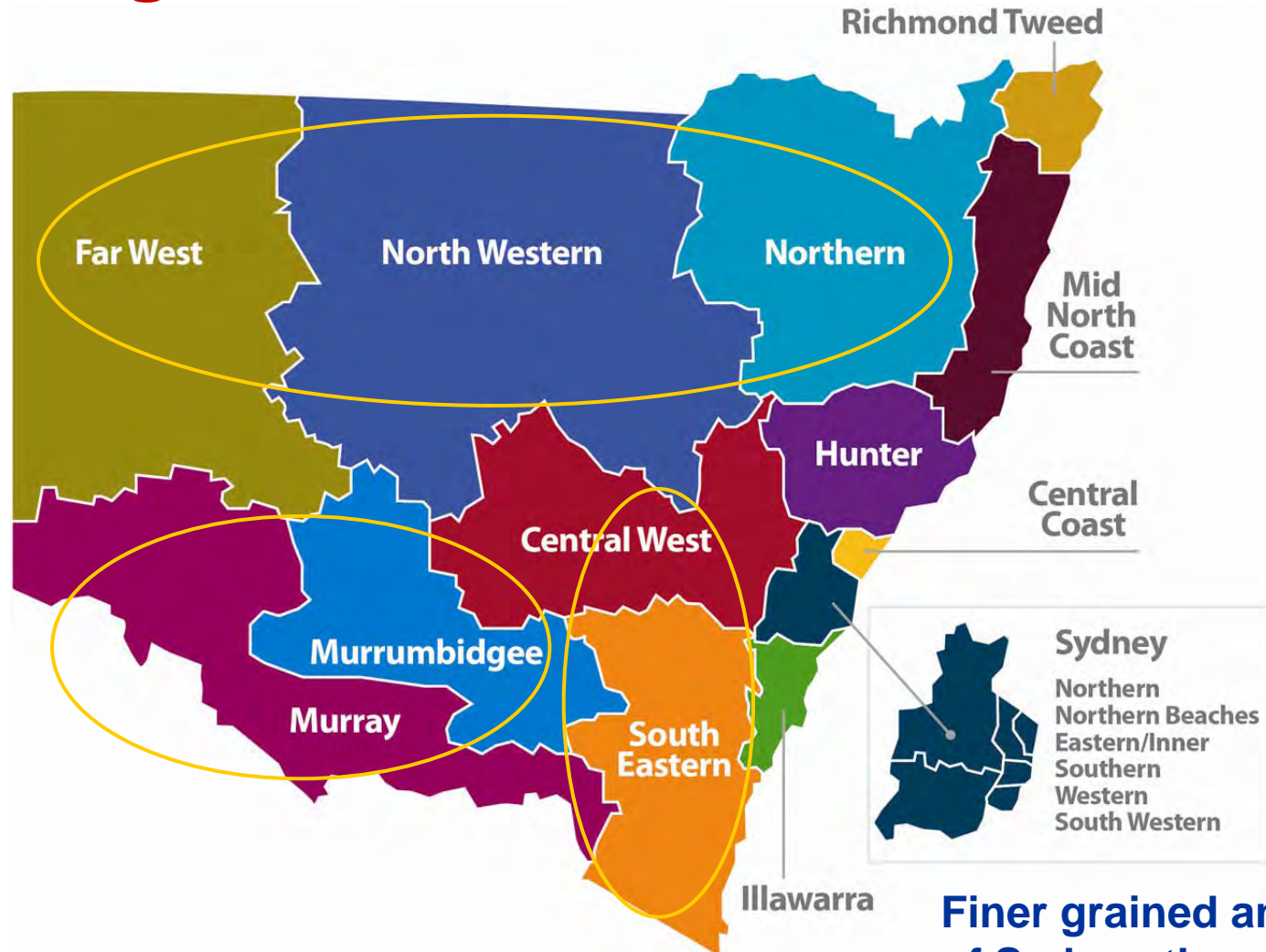
- Nine groups across metro & regional NSW (Orange, Tamworth, Newcastle and Wagga); September 2012
- Explored specific issues and concepts, as well as issues raised in the survey

# Analysis

- **Statewide**
- **Region**
- **Demographic characteristics**
- **Concern about environmental problems**



# The regions





# Analysis

## By demographic characteristics:

- Gender
- Age
- Education level
- Language spoken at home
- Employment status
- Parental status
- Dwelling type
- Location by settlement type
- Location by region (LG regions with some combined, except for Sydney)





# Analysis by concern

All questions analysed by **level** of concern about environmental problems:

High – concerned ‘**a great deal**’

Moderate – concerned ‘**a fair amount**’

Little or no concern – ‘**a little**’ concerned or **not concerned**



# Community context

- Ongoing impact of global financial crisis, subdued economic mood
- Drought turned to floods in 2011 and 2012 in many parts of state
- Carbon tax introduced July 2012
- Coal seam gas exploration and extraction expands, along with media attention
- Significant increases in electricity costs over previous 3 years
- Focus by government on public transport and developing a transport masterplan



# The big themes

- People are more positive about the environment: its in good shape, there's less concern about issues...  
....optimism or a sense of disengagement?
- But there is also no dominant environmental 'problem'
- A number of findings illustrate interest in and concern about 'biodiversity' issues
- Improving knowledge
- In behaviours, a little slippage but essentially little change
- Significant relationships found between concern, behaviours and perceived efficacy

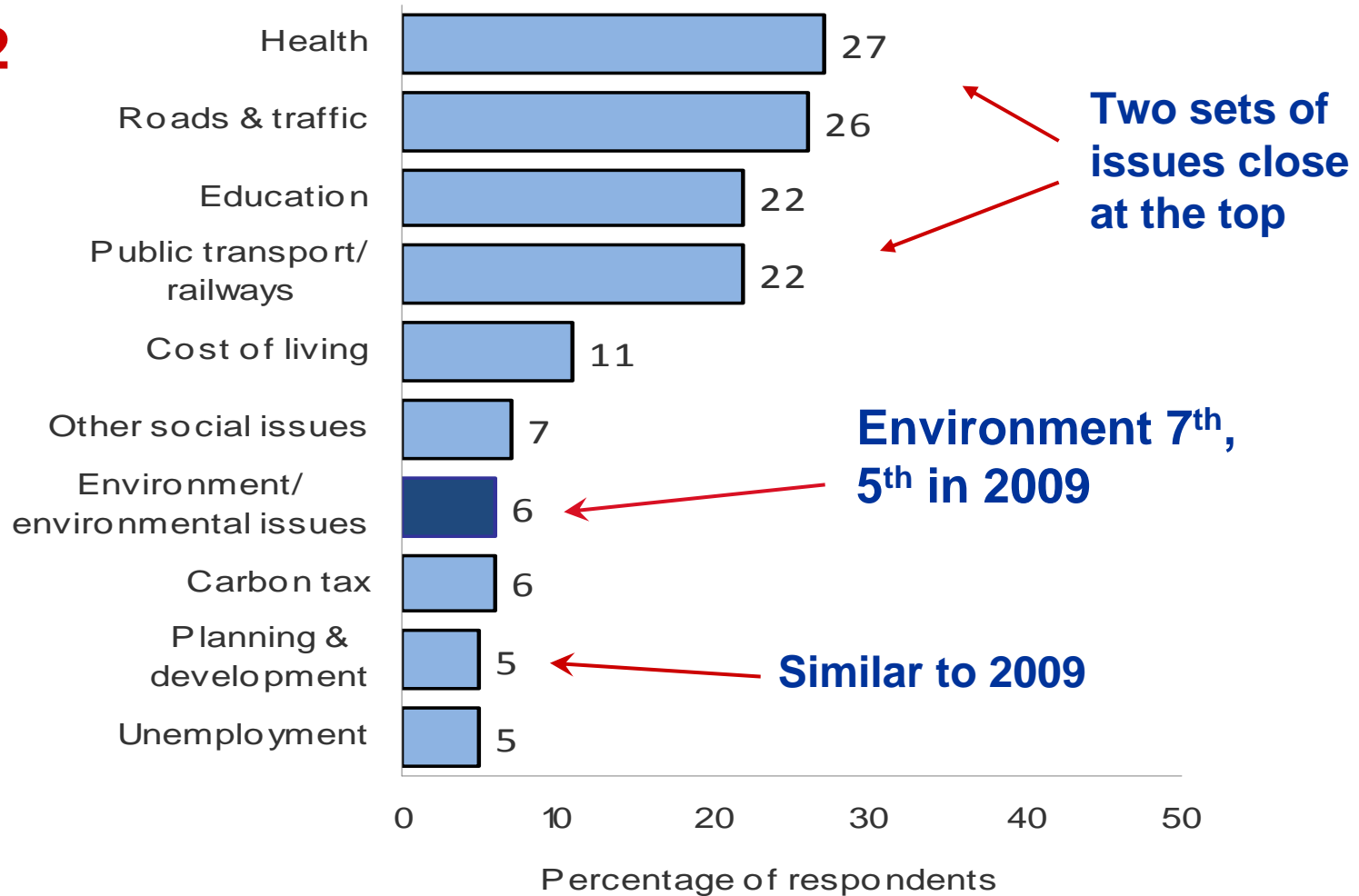


# Findings I

## *Priorities and attitudes*

## Two most important issues for NSW Government attention now

**2012**

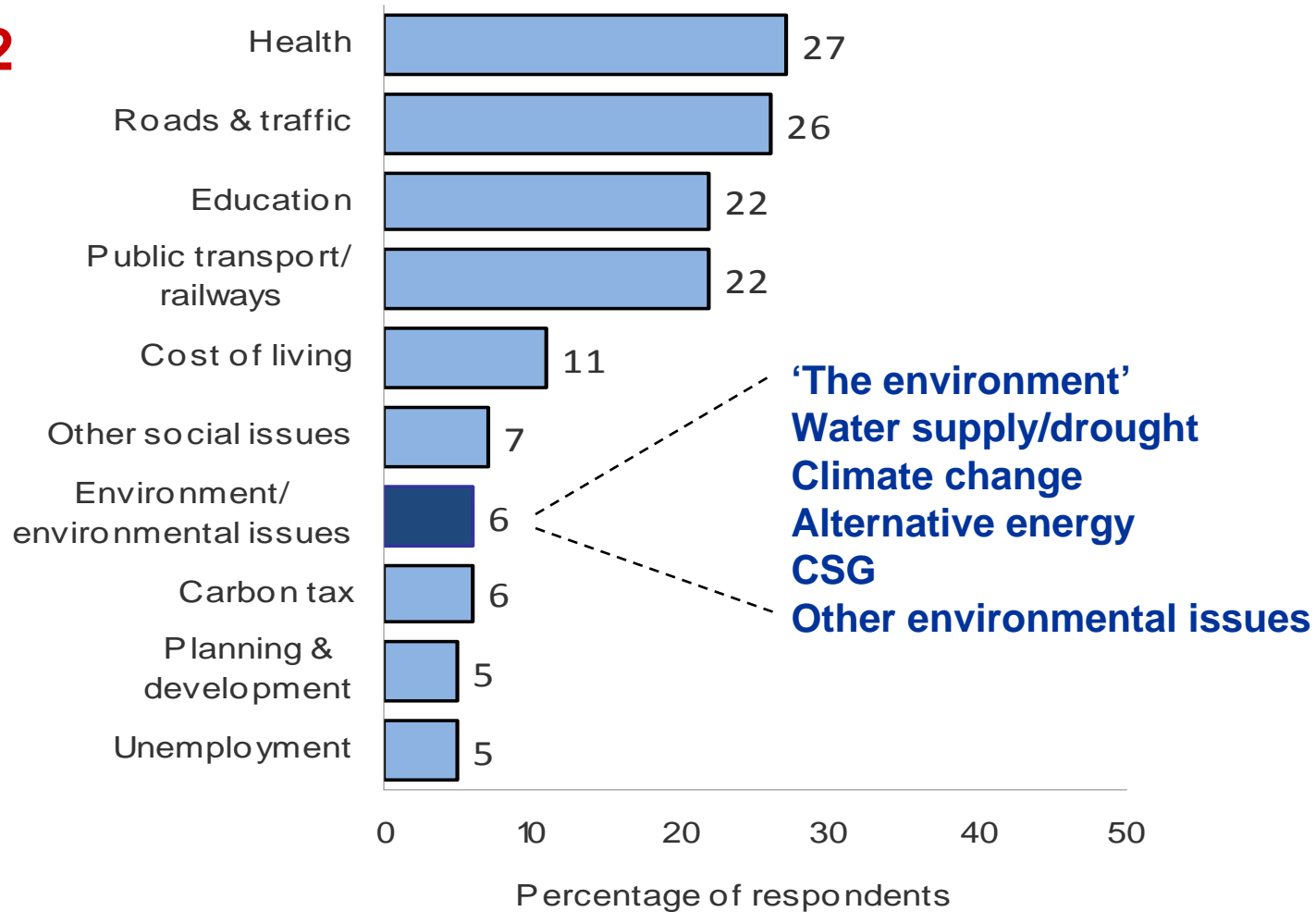


**Q.** What would you say are the two most important issues for attention by the State Government at present? (Unprompted)



## Two most important issues for NSW Government attention now

**2012**

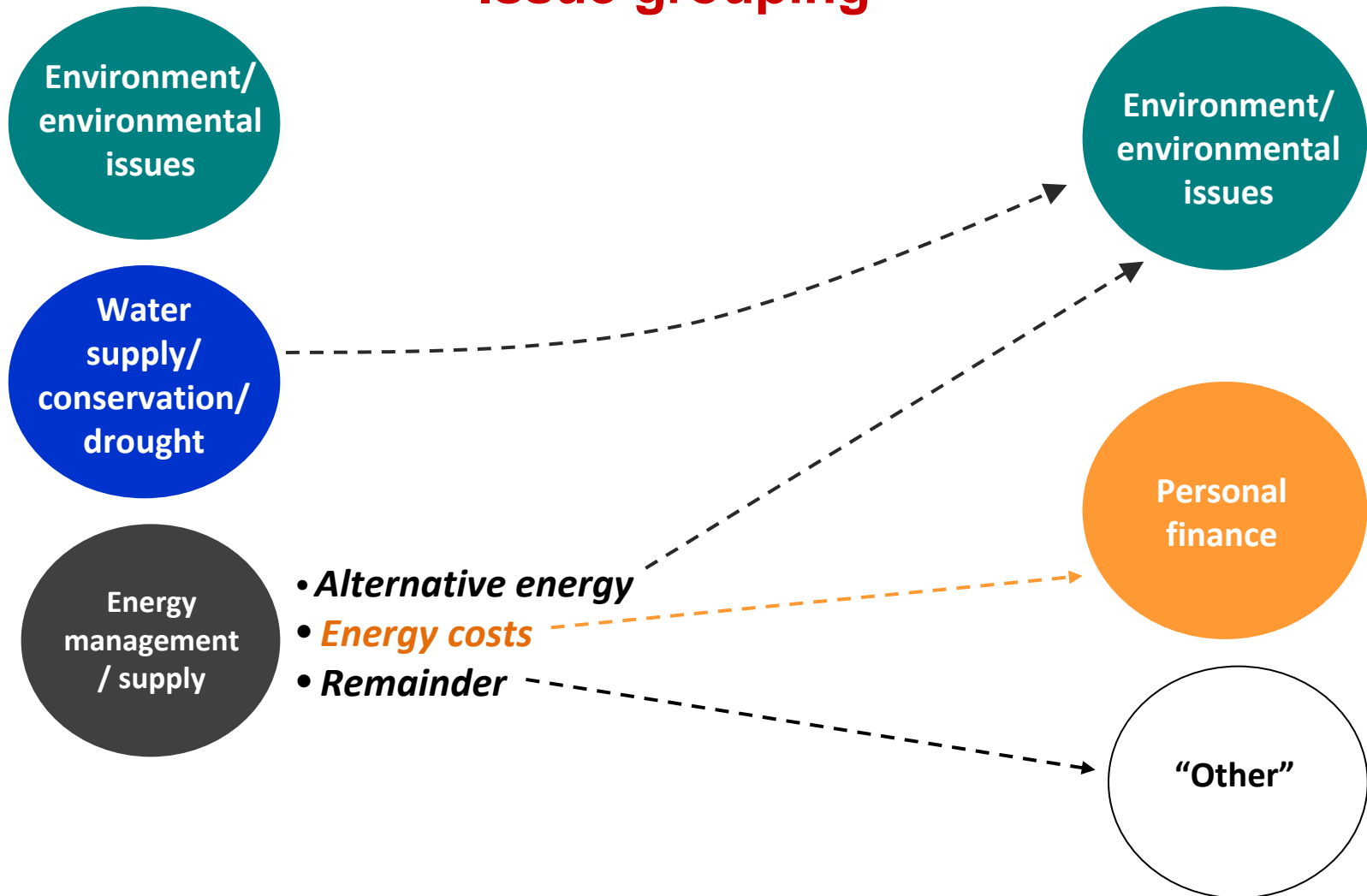


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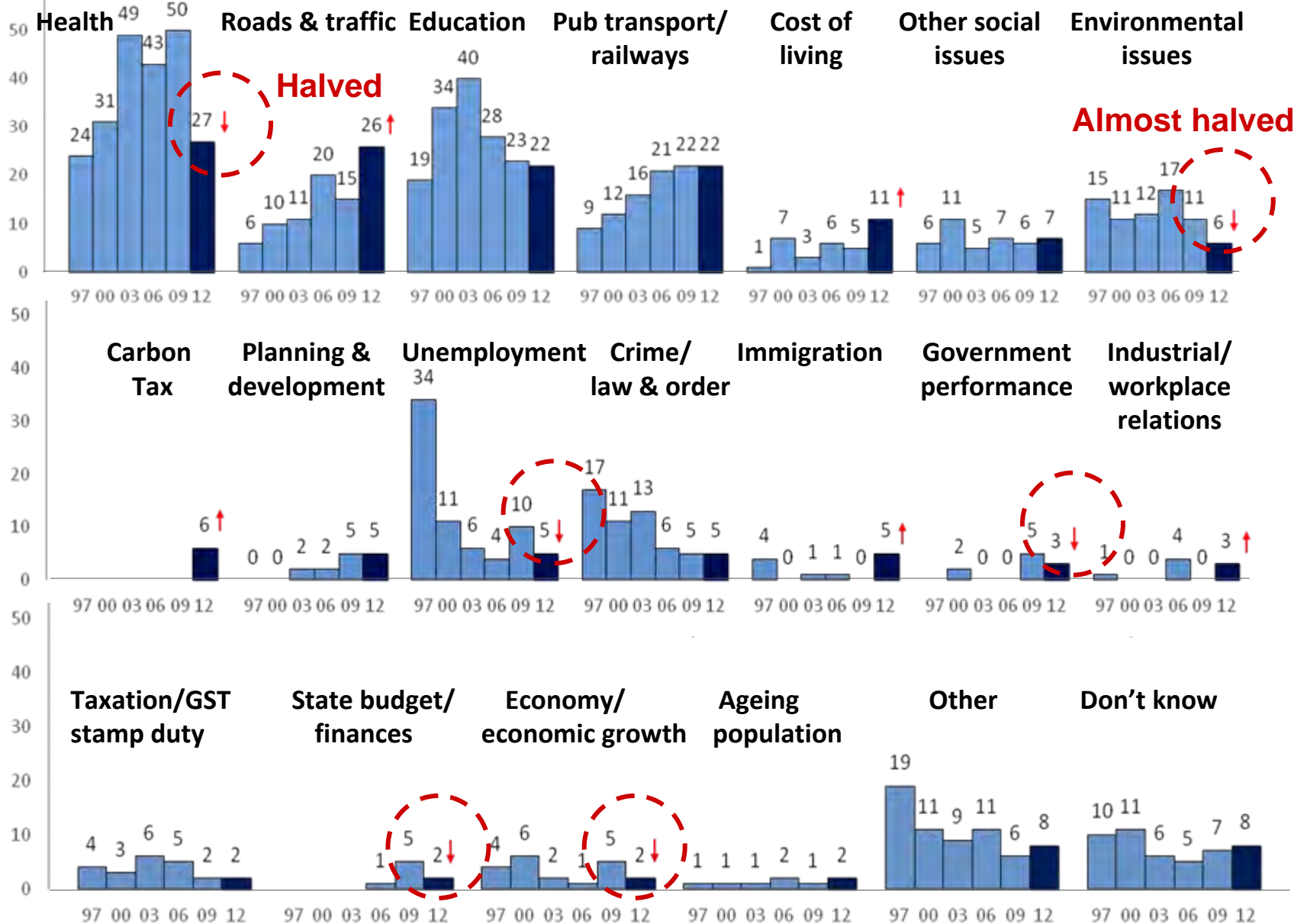
2009

2012

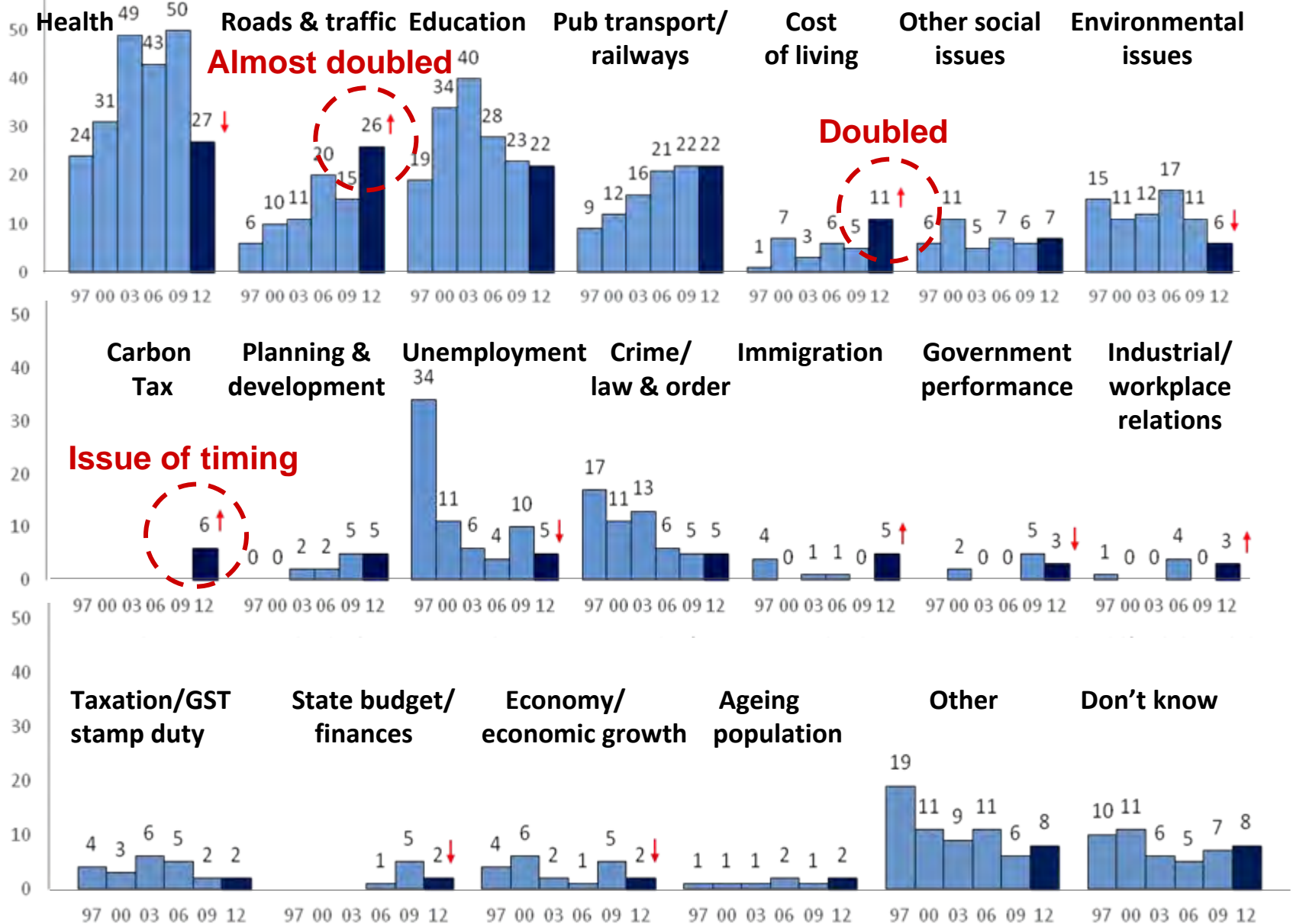
## Issue grouping



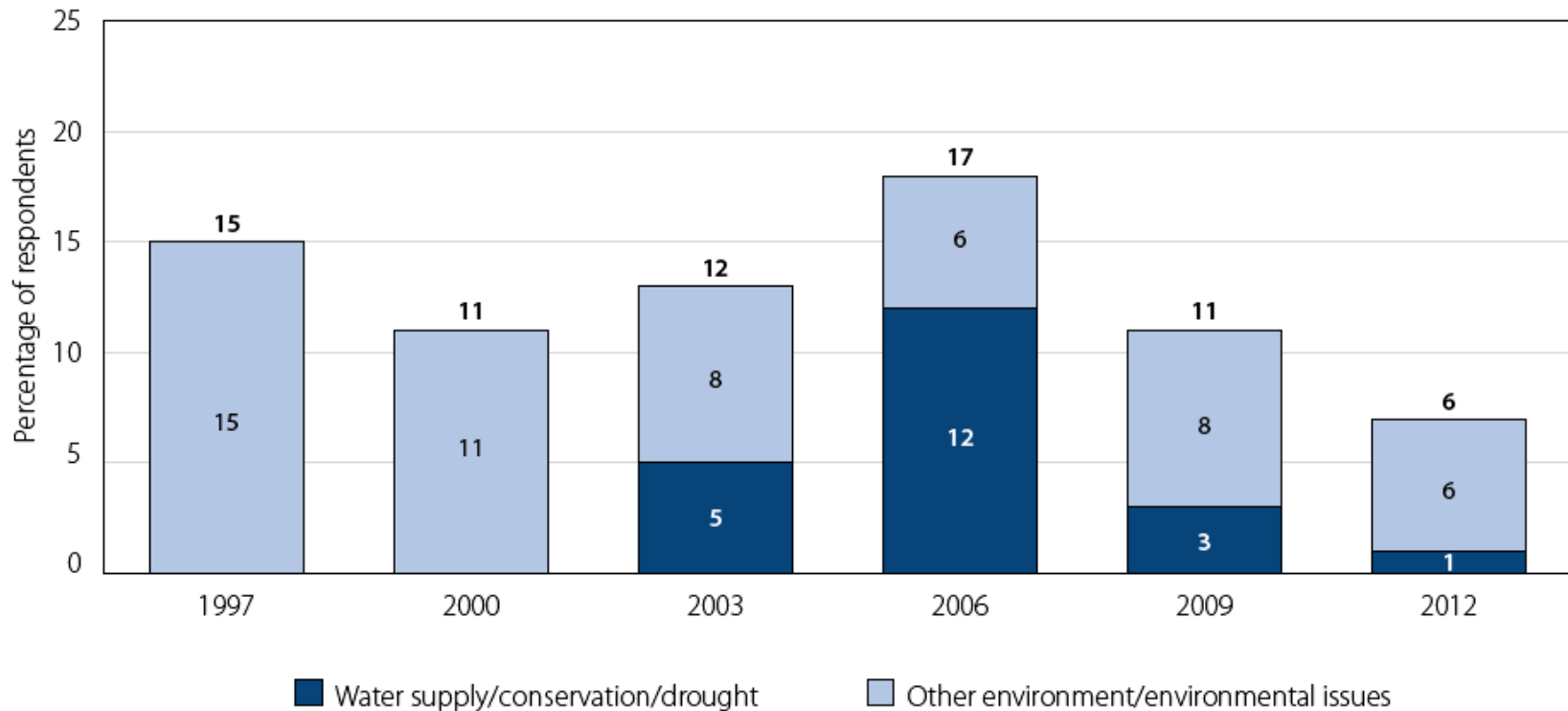
# Two most important issues for NSW Government attention now - trends



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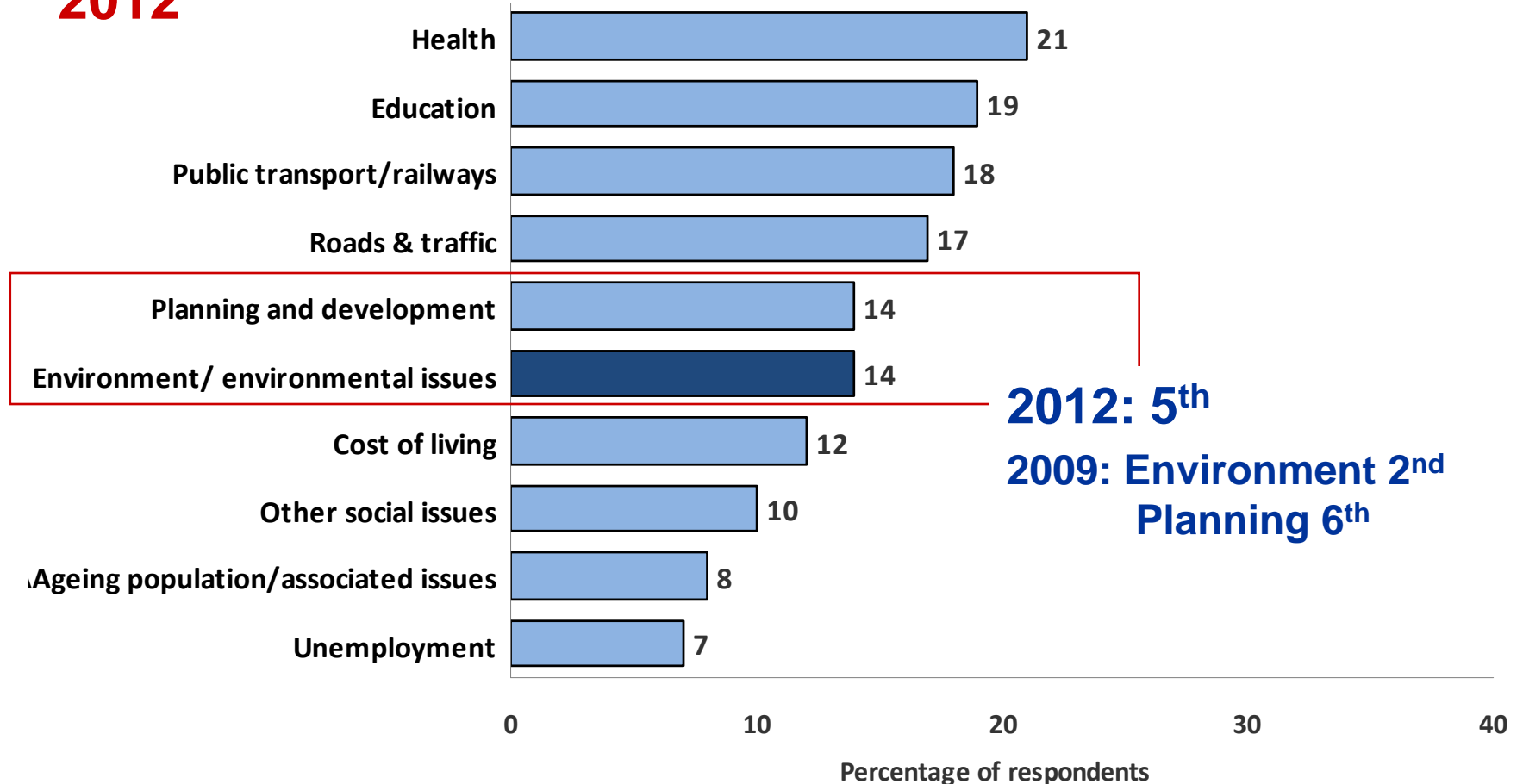
### The impact of water issues and drought on environment category





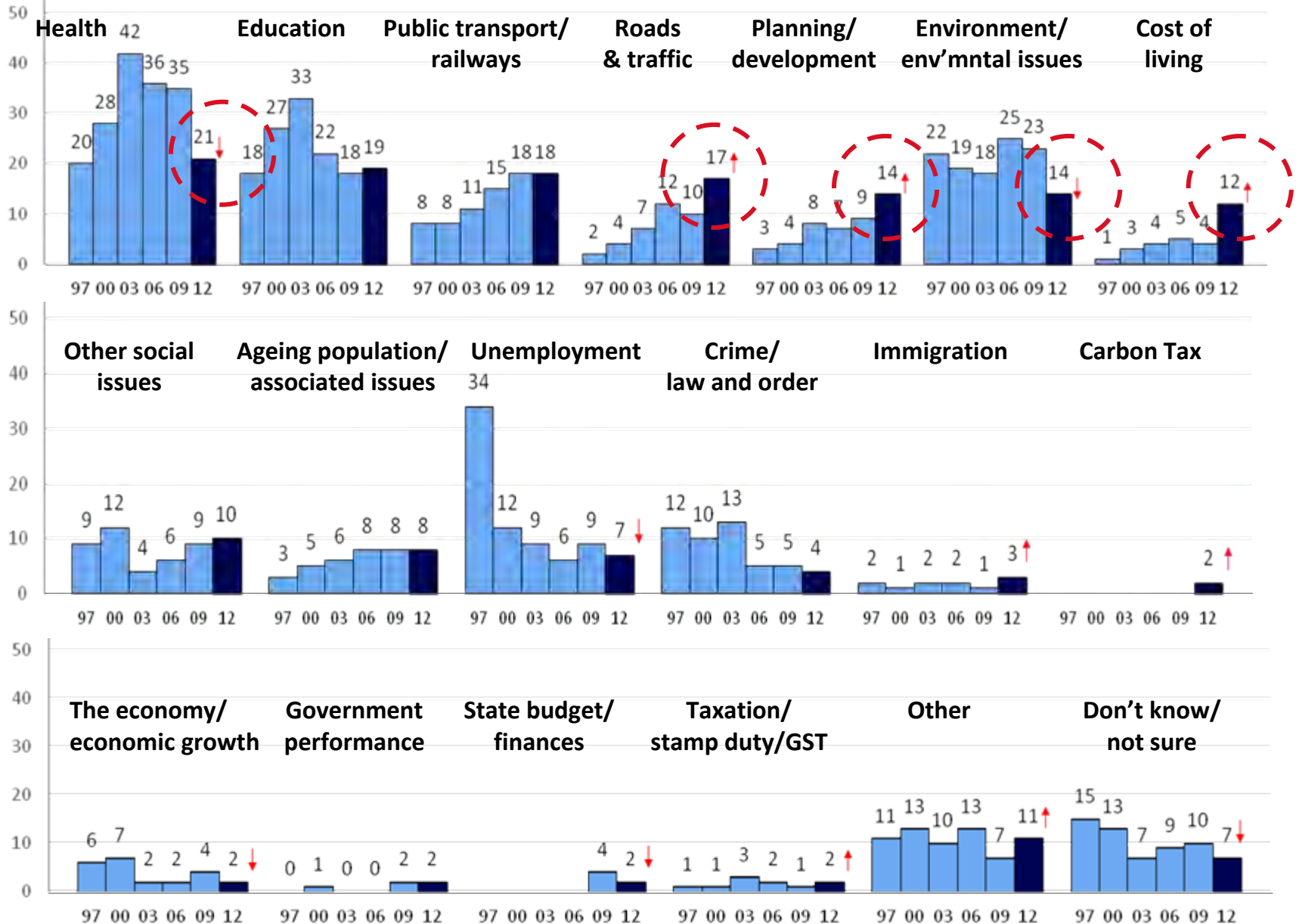
## Two most important issues for NSW Government attention in 10 years

**2012**

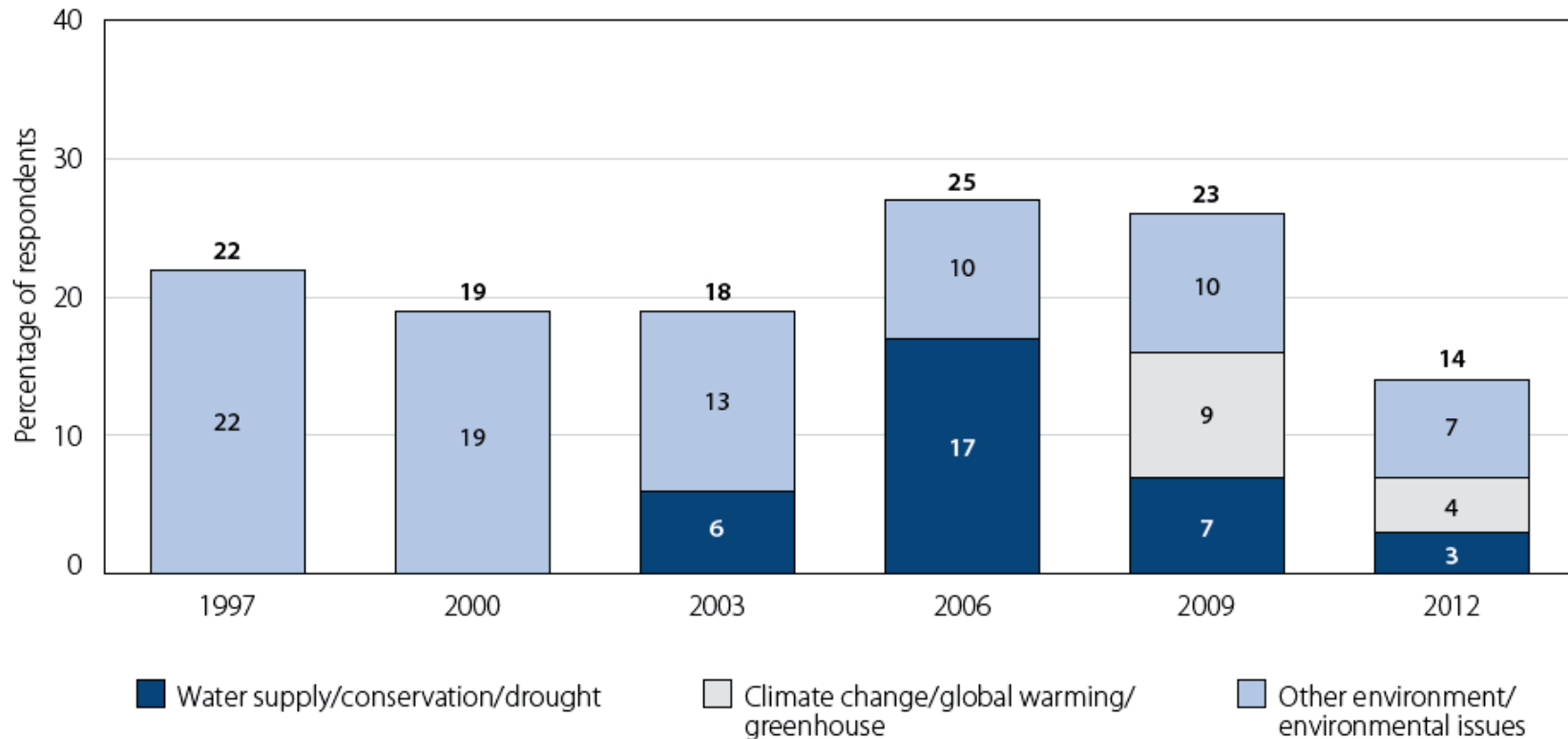


*Q. Now thinking ahead about ten years,  
what do you think will be the two most  
important issues for attention by the State  
government ten years from now?  
(Unprompted)*

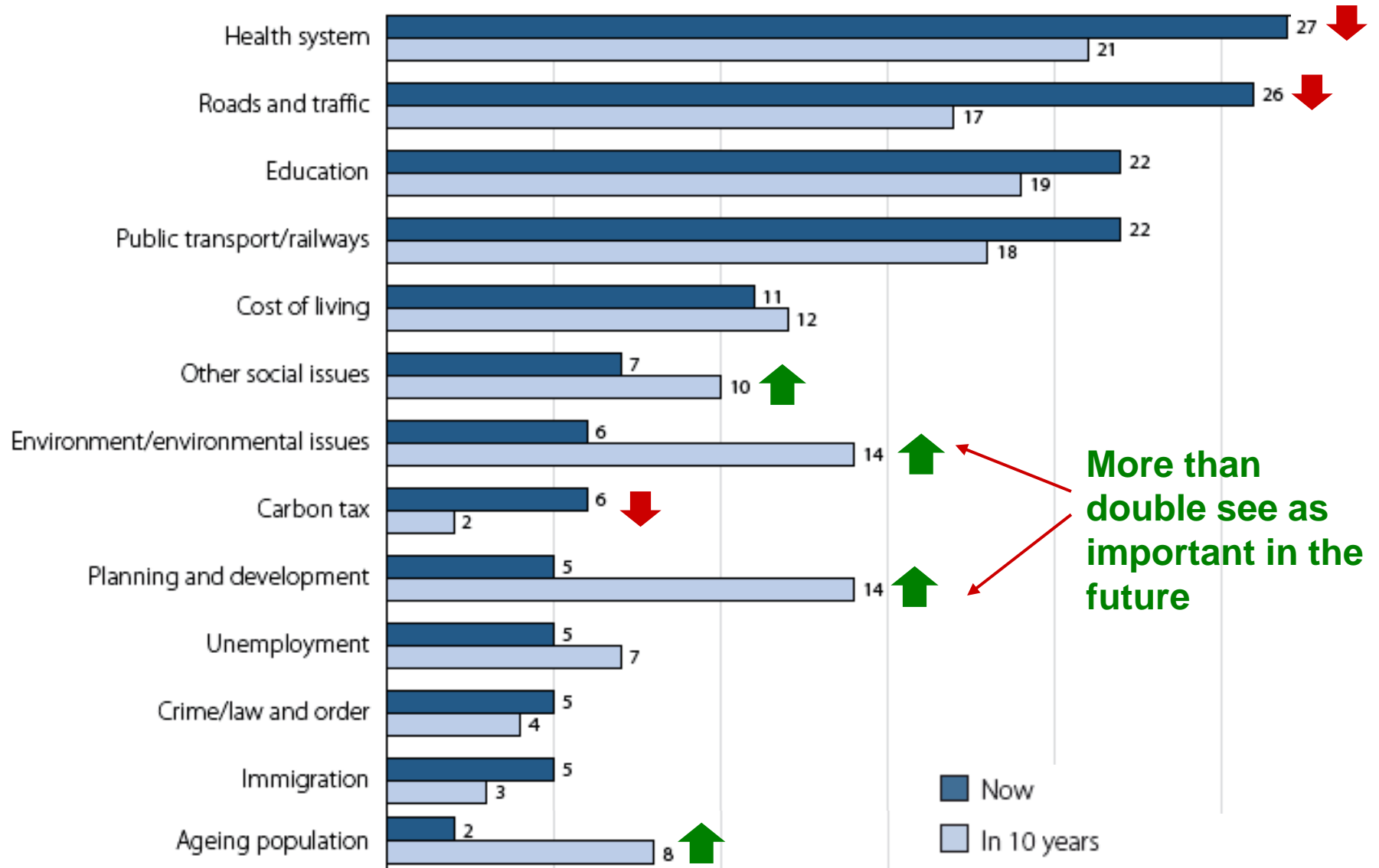
# Two most important issues for NSW Government in 10 years - trends



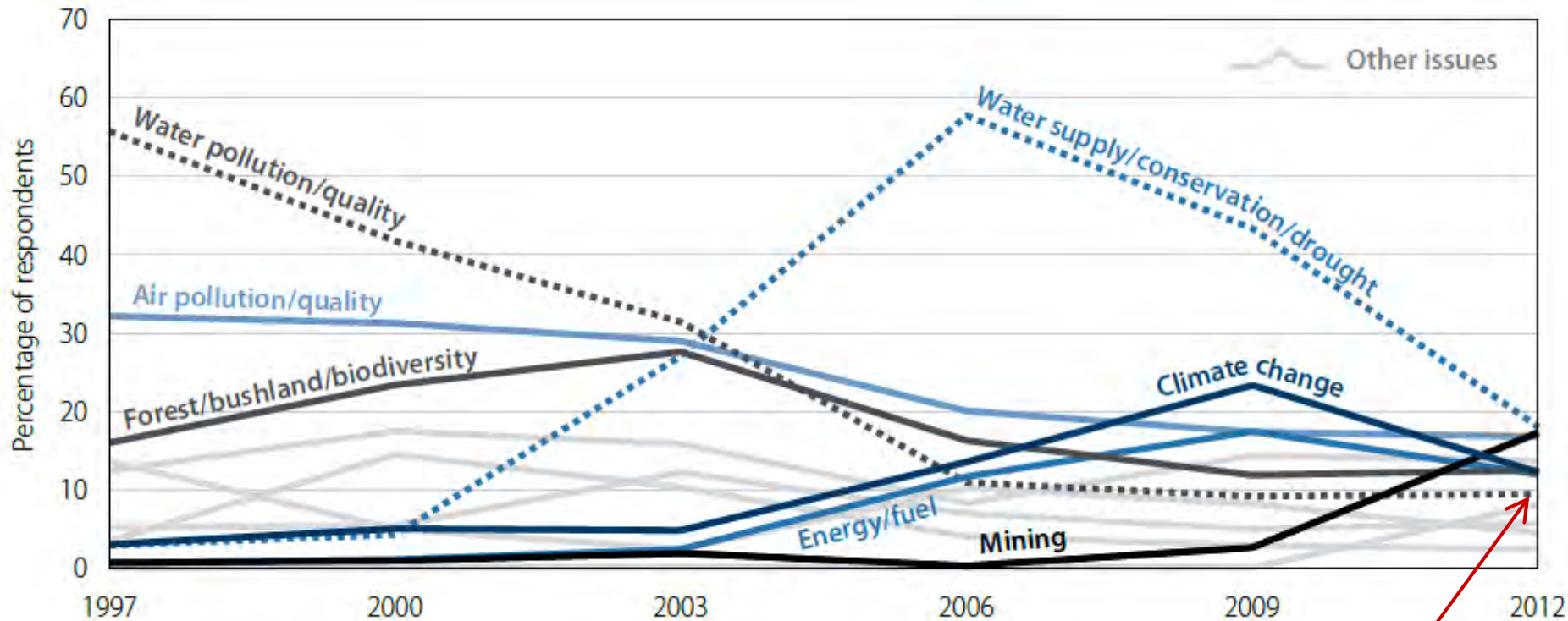
## Impact of water and climate change on the environment category



# Two most important issues for NSW: now and in 10 years



## Most important environmental issues in NSW today – trends 1997-2012



**Q.** What would you say is the single most important environmental issue in NSW today?  
 Question 2(b): And what would you say is the second most important environmental issue in NSW today?  
 (Unprompted)

**No dominant issue  
 7 issues on 12-18%**



## Top issues in 2012

- **Water supply, conservation and management/drought (18%)**
- **Mining (17%, incl. CSG 12%)**
- **Air pollution / air quality (17%)**
- **Waste (14%)**
- **Forest / bushland / biodiversity (12%)**
- **Climate change (12%)**
- **Energy / fuel (12%)**

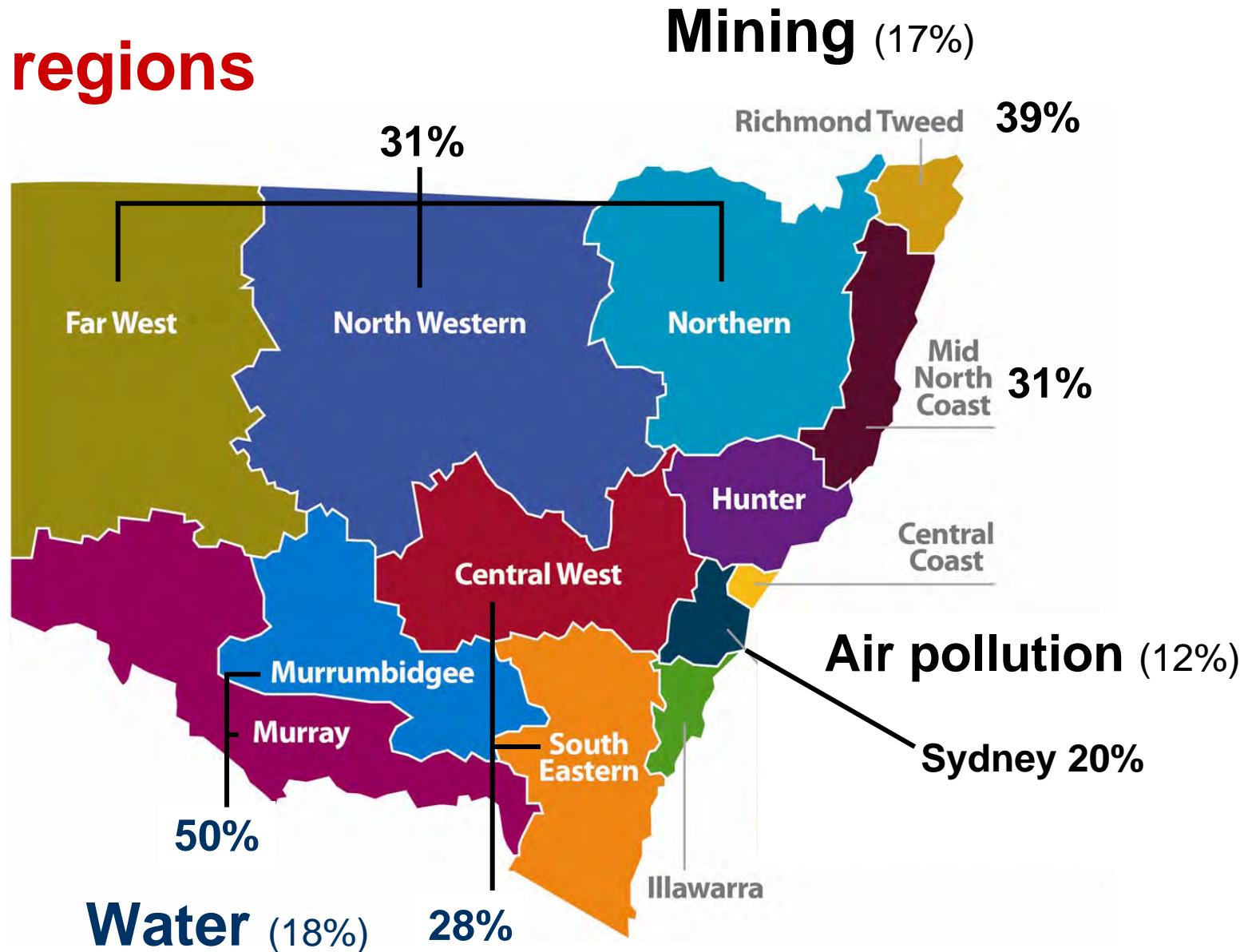
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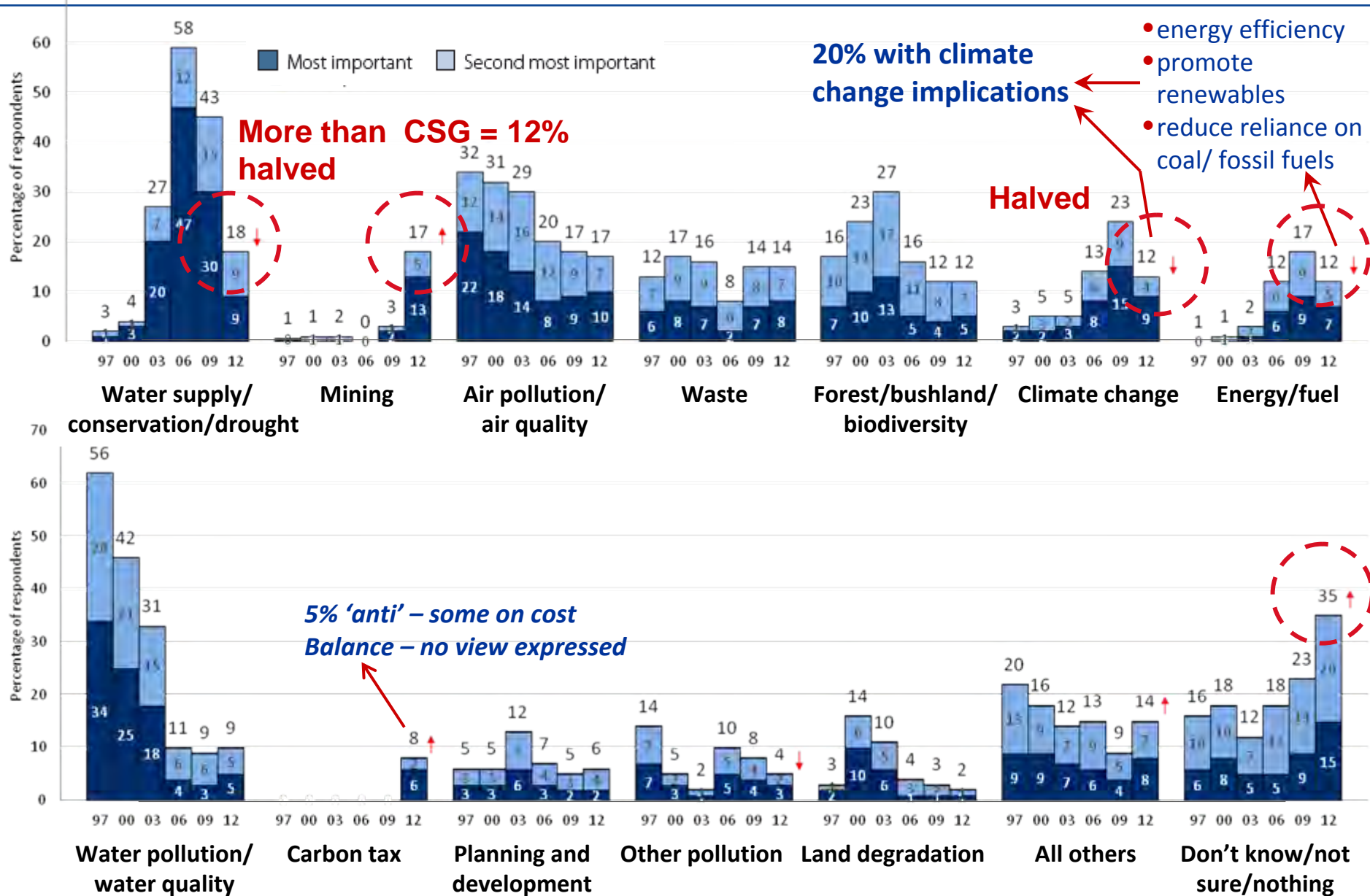
*(Unprompted)*

# Two most important environmental issues in NSW today

## By regions



# Two most important environmental issues in NSW today



## Most important environmental issues by concern

Those concerned 'a great deal' about environmental problems nominate three issues to a greater degree than the overall community

	Community overall %	Concerned a great deal about environmental problems %
Mining	17	27
Forest/ bushland/ biodiversity	12	18
Energy fuel	12	16

# What is environment?

Associations from the qualitative

2009

Water

Air

Sustainability

Pollution

Global warming

Climate change

Fishing/farmers

Bushfire

Ozone

Health

Energy

Endangered species

Ecosystems

National parks

ETS

Biodiversity

Landscapes



# What is environment?

Associations from the qualitative

2012



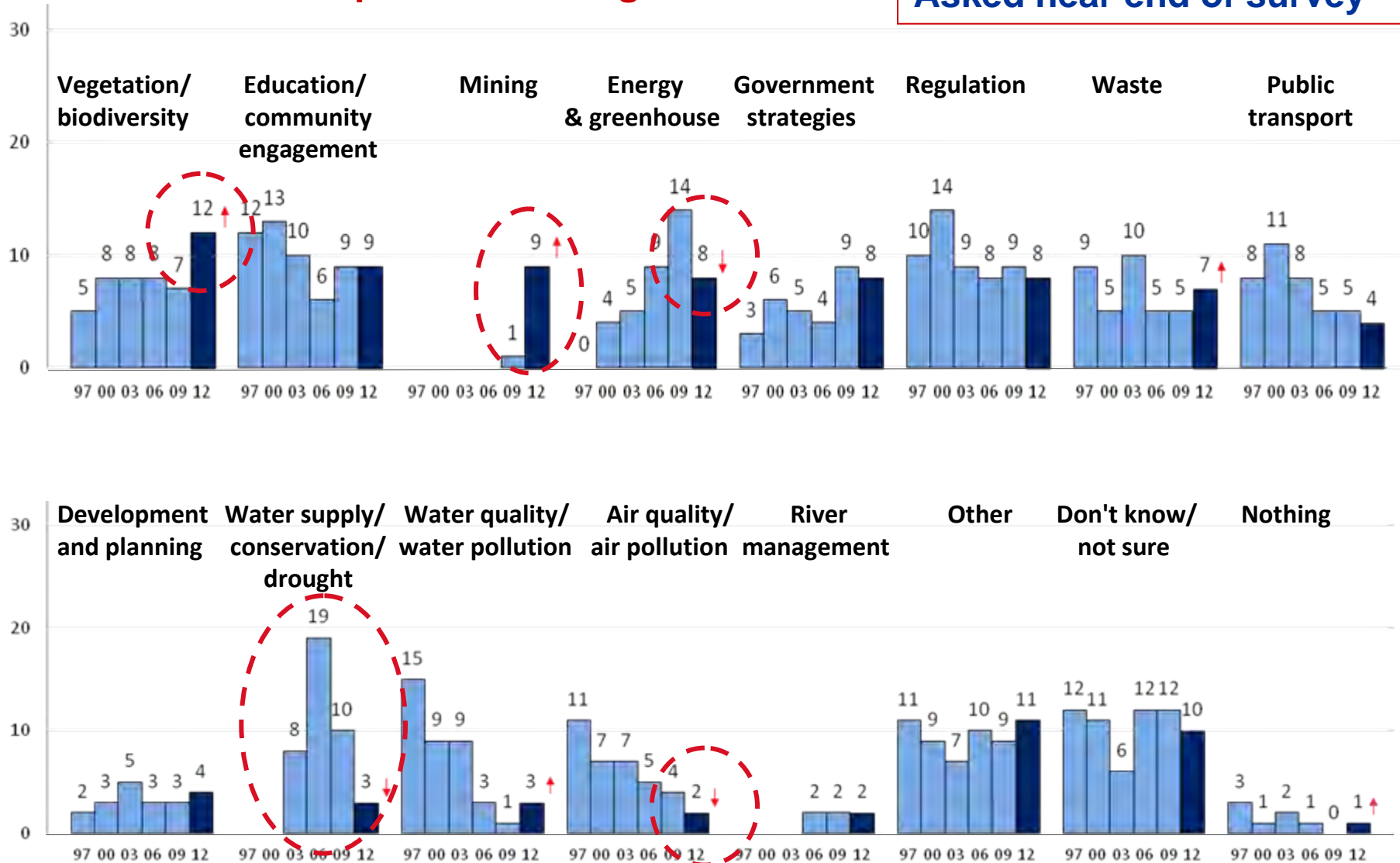
## Discussing environmental problems (qualitative)

- A diverse range of environmental concerns were mentioned, but **no single issue dominated**
- The over-riding impression was that when thinking about environmental problems, people in the groups were quite **focussed on local issues and threats to the general amenity of the places where they live.**

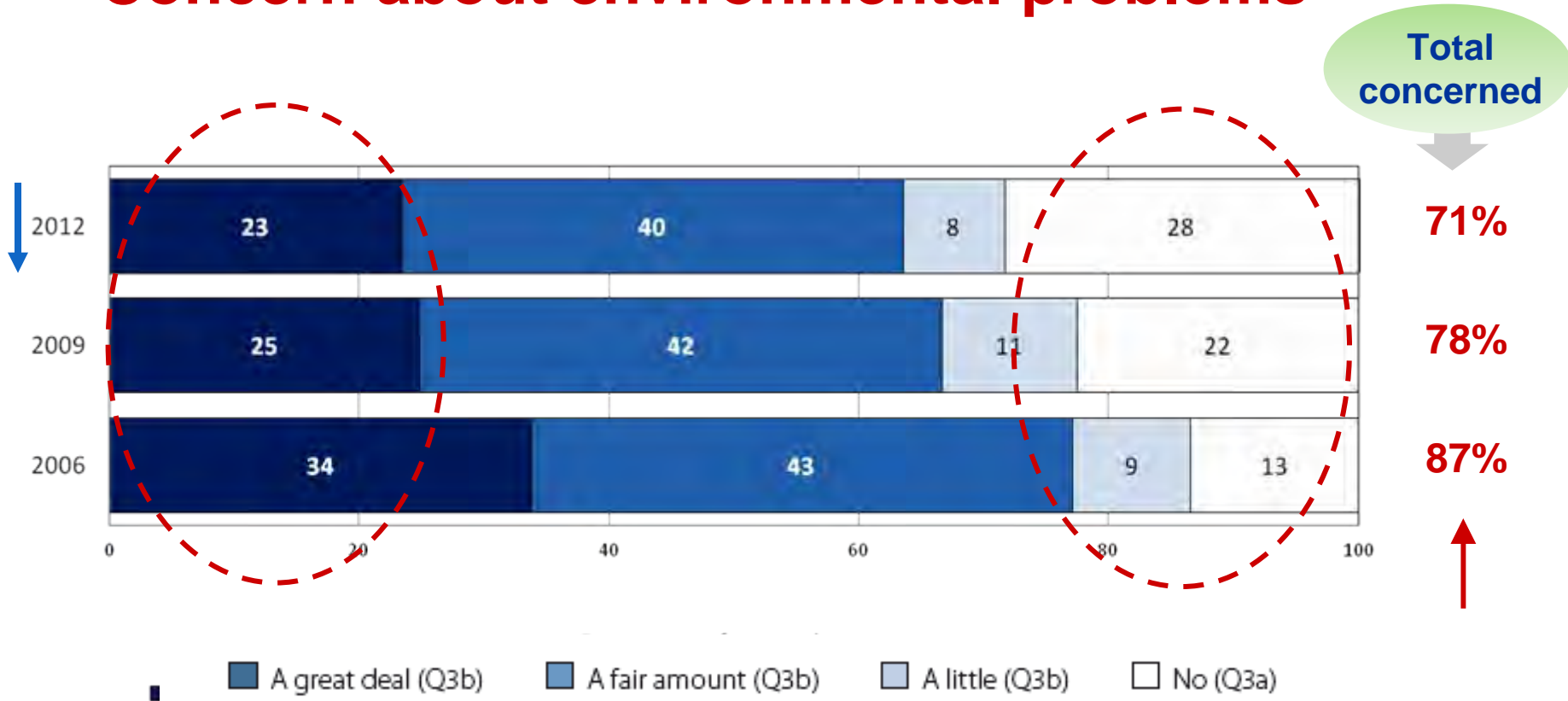
# Most important environmental initiative for NSW Government over next few years

**A mixture of topics and strategies...**

**Asked near end of survey**



# Concern about environmental problems



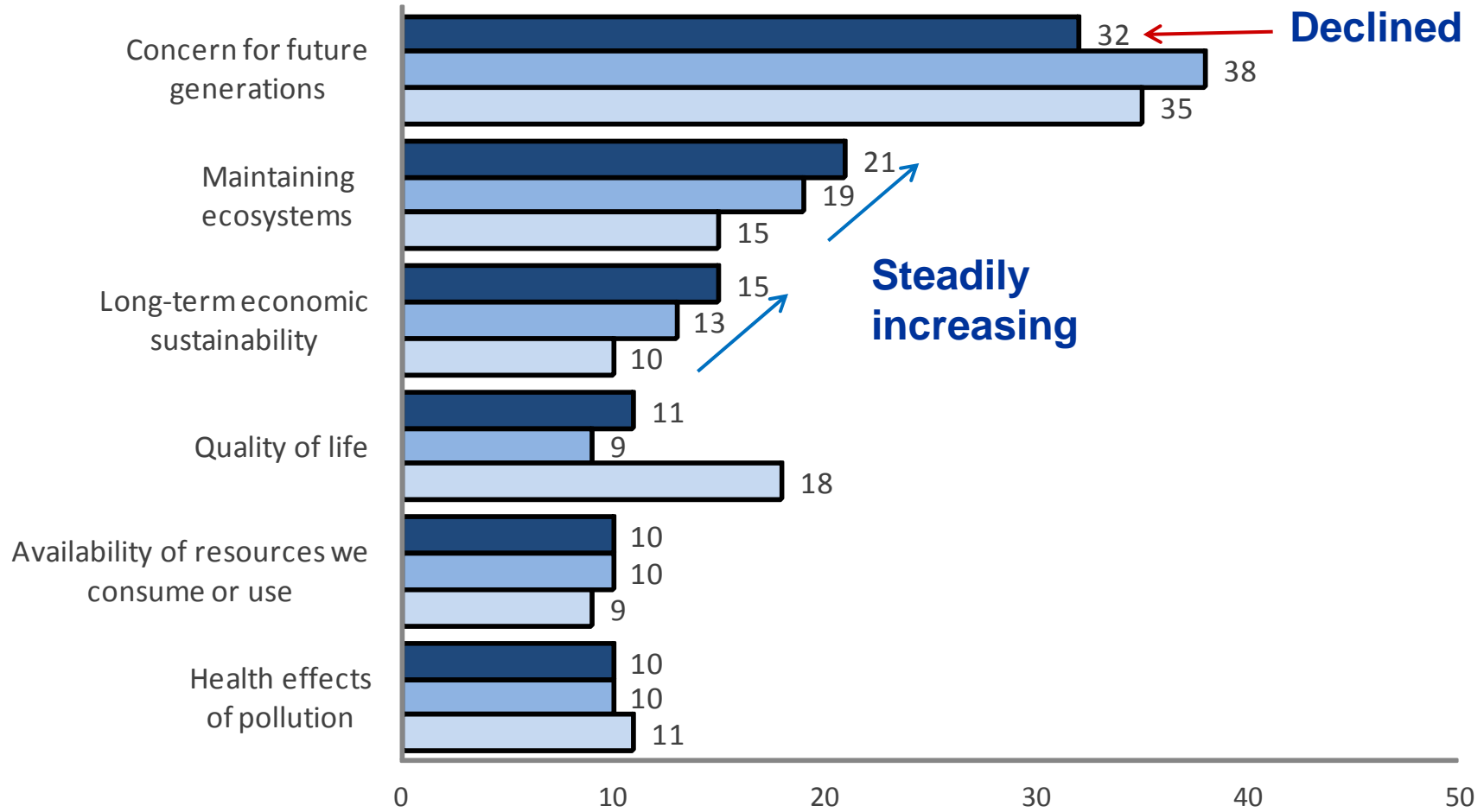
Question 3(a): In general, are you concerned about environmental problems?  
Question 3(bi): Would you say you are concerned a great deal, a fair amount, or a little?

**Qualitative – even those not concerned in general are concerned about specific issues**

## Differences in concern

- Women more likely to be concerned than men
- *Degree of concern increases with age (to 64)*
- Those more likely to be concerned and to be concerned 'a great deal':
  - have higher education
  - are from the Eastern Suburbs/Inner Sydney

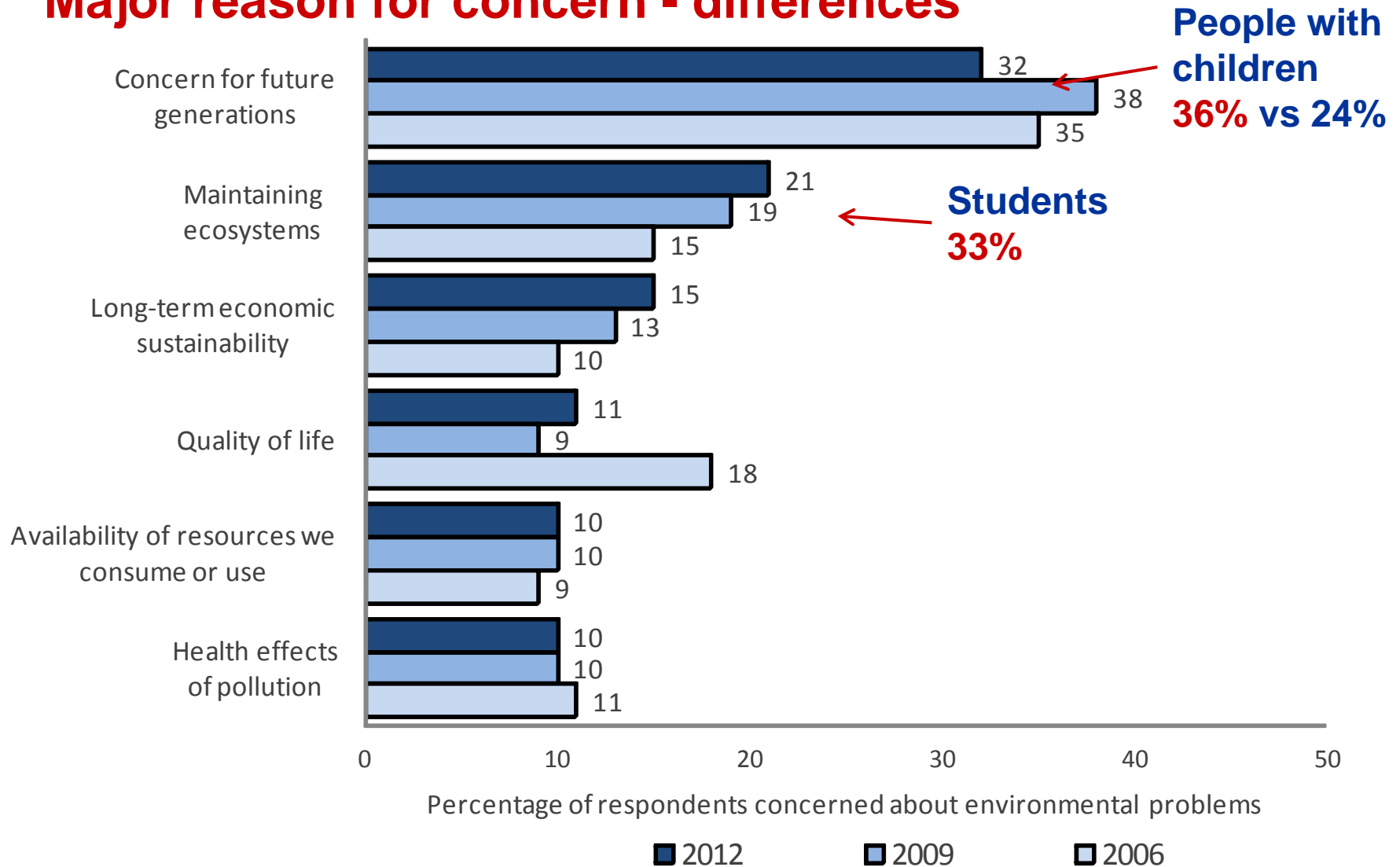
## Major reason for concern



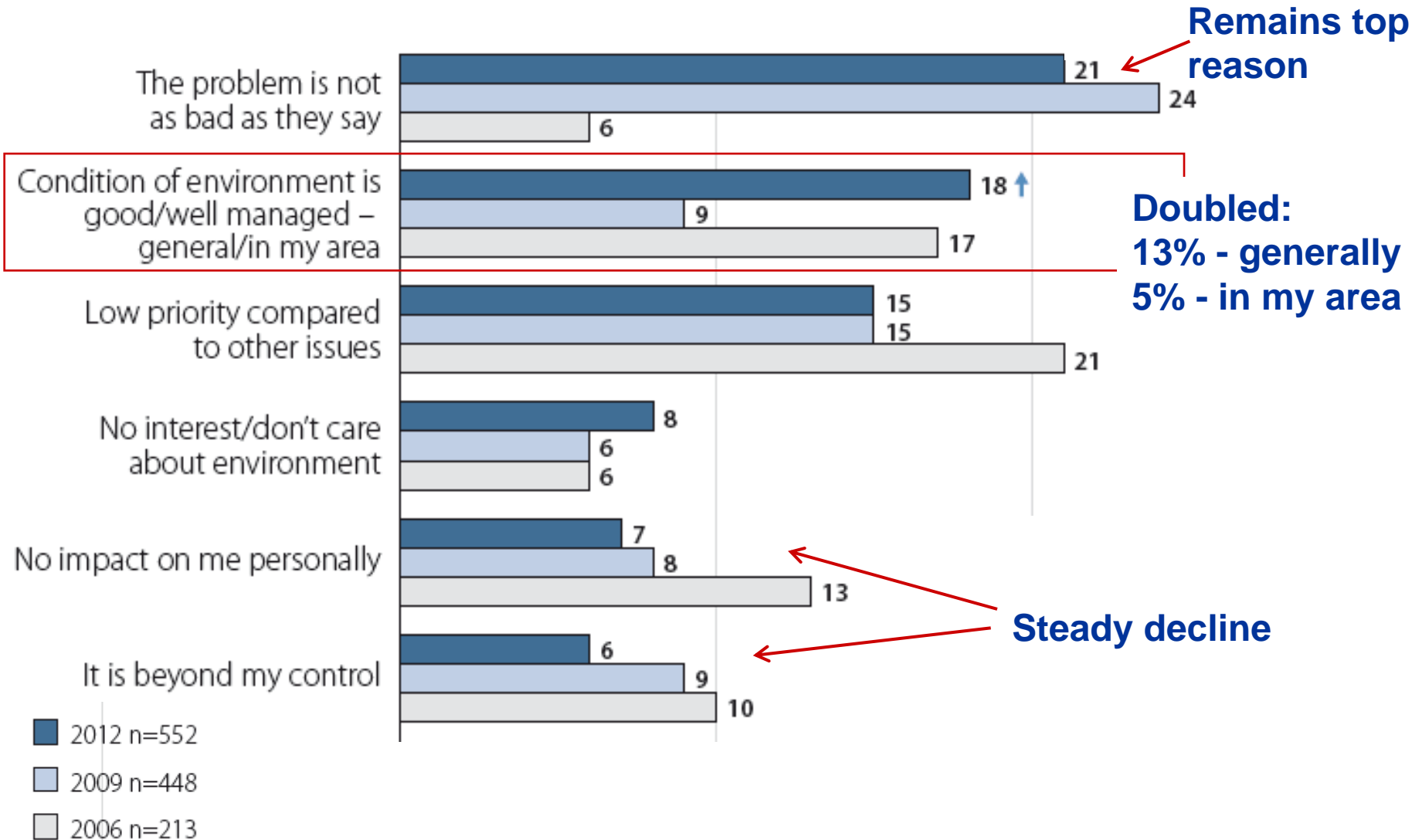
**Q. (If concerned) Which one of the following best describes what you are concerned about?**



## Major reason for concern - differences



## Reasons not concerned – top reasons



## From the *qualitative* research

People *do* intrinsically value ‘the environment’:

*What makes an area a nice place to live?*

- greenery and trees
- clean environment, absence of rubbish and pollution
- services and facilities: schools, shopping, hospitals
- adequate infrastructure such as public transport
- safety
- sense of space (especially in rural groups)

*How do you feel when outdoors, in a national park or in the bush?*

- beautiful
- good for the soul
- peaceful
- clean
- calming

## ‘Concern’ varies according to the issue

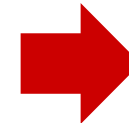
After some thought, people do acknowledge there are environmental ‘problems’ that are cause for some concern and a need to act – initially focussing on local - then unfolding to more macro

### Moderators of concern:

It’s not as bad as they say:

- Earth adapts and recovers
- predictions have not come true/ over hyped
- conflicting science/ information  
(not just climate change)

Highly politicised



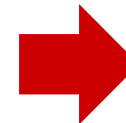
What’s the truth?  
Too hard  
Disengage



Lack of a pressing environmental issue

+

Personal finances/ GFC hangover



Environment  
takes lower  
priority



# Findings II

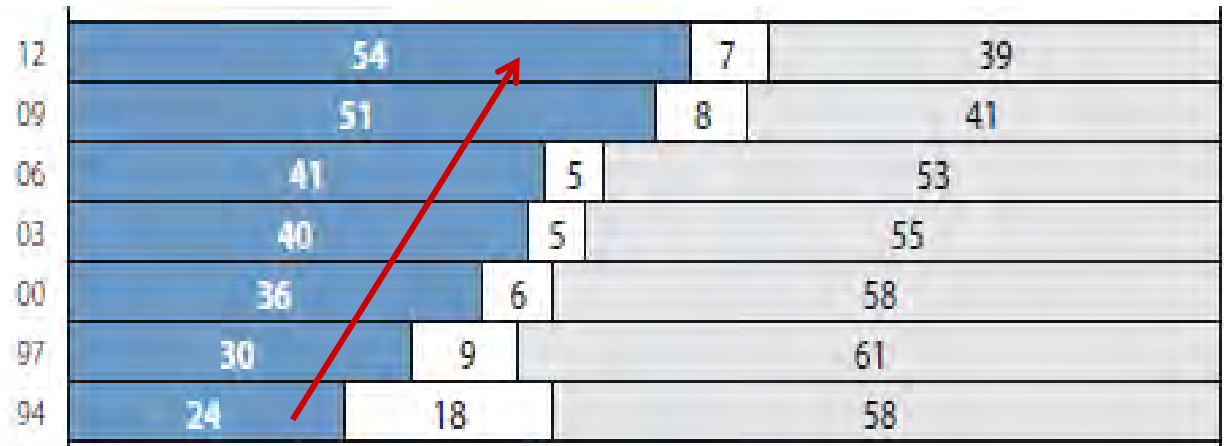
## *Knowledge and views*

## Knowledge: Five true/false statements

*Bushfires always cause long term damage to Australian ecosystems (false)*

**74%**  
correct

*The greenhouse effect is caused by a hole in the Earth's atmosphere (false)*





## Knowledge: improved

*Industrial sites and sewerage treatment plants cause more pollution of waterways and beaches than general rainfall runoff (false)*

2009

39%

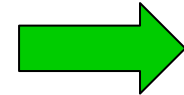


2012

**45%**  
correct

*Recycling paper, cardboard and glass saves materials but not water, energy and fuel (false)*

32%



**37%**  
correct

## Knowledge: declined

*More mammals have become extinct in recorded history in Australia than in any other country (true)*

2006

51%

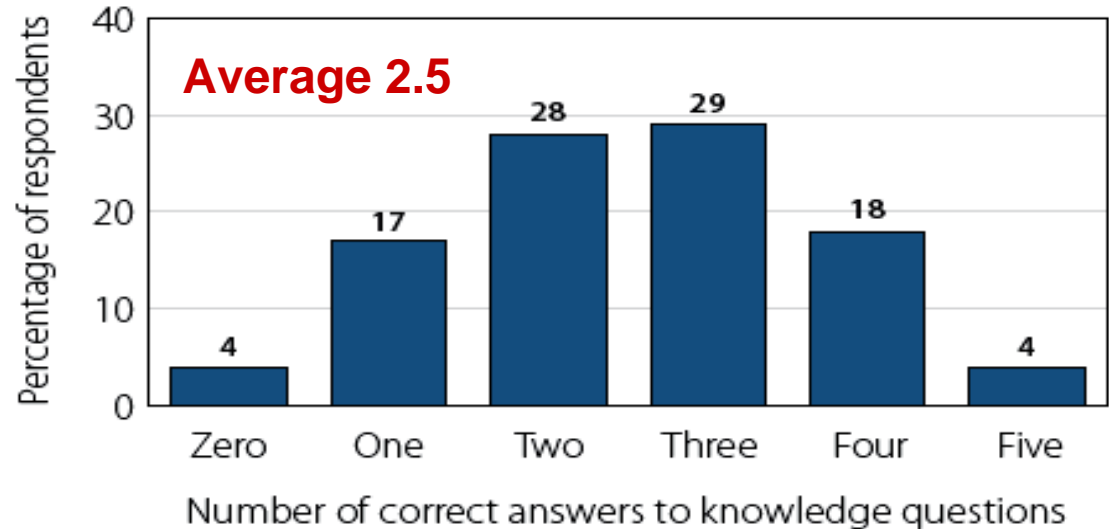


2012

**44%**  
correct

## Knowledge profiles

- Typically, people answer two or three correctly
- About 20% at either extreme (0 / 1, or 4 / 5)



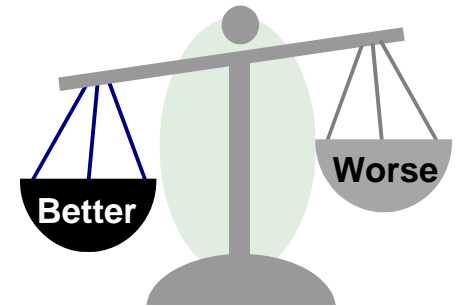
- Men get more correct (av. 2.7) compared to women (2.4)
- The number of correct answers increases with age, up to 64
- On all questions, correct answers increase with level of concern

## **Knowledge and associations - *qualitative***

- **‘Biodiversity’ was not understood by most**
- **‘Ecosystems’ was understood by a few**
- **‘Catchment’ was well understood; emphasis on water**
- **‘Natural heritage’ was difficult to encapsulate – found it easiest to name iconic areas**
- **‘Cultural heritage’ was more difficult than natural heritage – themes were Aboriginal traditions and customs, Australian way of life and historical or iconic buildings**

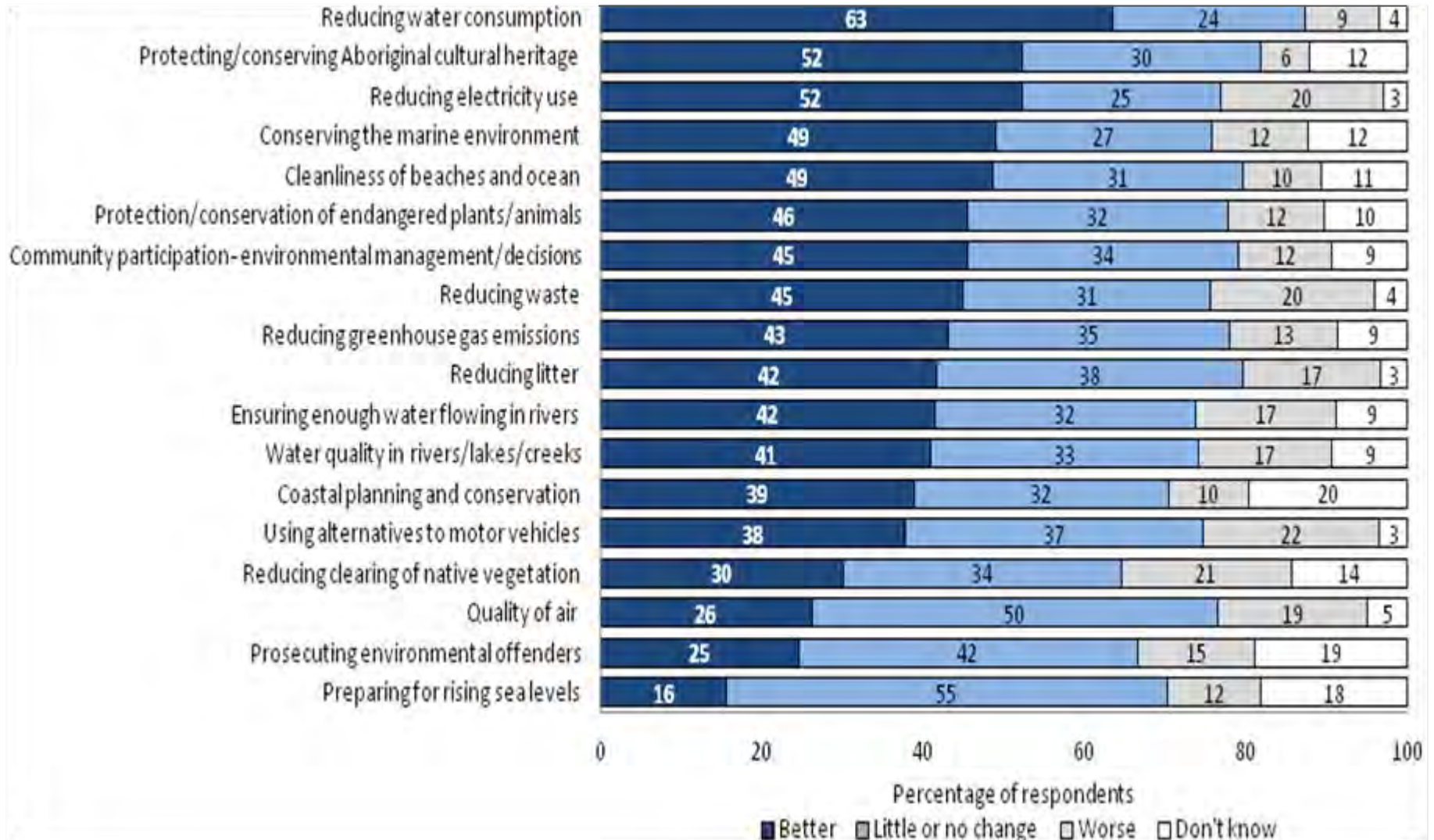
# Environmental improvement or deterioration in NSW over the past three years

- 18 indicators or issues – 1 new
- For nearly all issues, more people feel the situation has become better over the past three years than become worse. On a few, balance is more even.



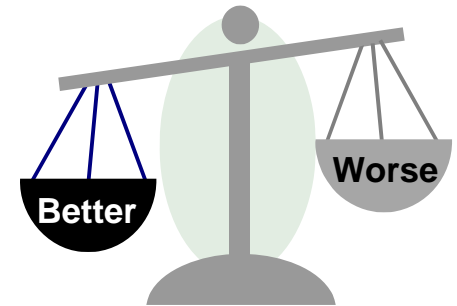
*Q. For each one can you tell me if you think that, over the last three years, things in NSW generally have become much better, a bit better, a bit worse, much worse or there has been little or no change?*

## How the issues are perceived: 2012



# Environmental improvement or deterioration in NSW over the past three years

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*Q. For each one can you tell me if you think that, over the last three years, things in NSW generally have become much better, a bit better, a bit worse, much worse or there has been little or no change?*



## Positive changes since 2009

More think has become “better” for:

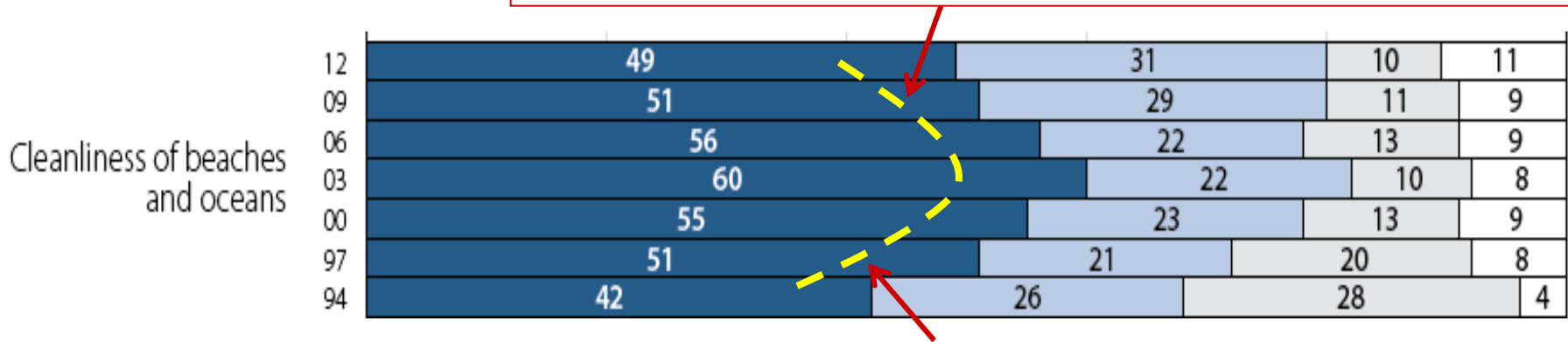
- *Ensuring enough water flowing in rivers – **42%** up from 27%*
- *Water quality in rivers, lakes and creeks – **41%** up from 33%*
- *Reducing electricity use – **52%** up from 48%*

Fewer think has become “worse” for:

- *Reducing greenhouse emissions – **13%** down from 18%*
- *Using alternatives to motor vehicles – **22%** down from 26%*
- *Quality of the air – **19%** down from 24%*
- *Coastal planning and development – **10%** down from 16%*
- *Prosecuting environmental offenders – **15%** down from 18%*

## 'No change' vs 'improvement'

From 2006, with improvements made and people less conscious of water pollution as an issue, sentiment about cleanliness of beaches and oceans gradually drifts to 'no change'



Mid-90's to 2003 effort directed at stormwater & sewerage problems ➡

- water pollution issue fell from a very high peak in Q.2
- increasing number of people saw improvement in cleanliness of beaches and oceans

## Discussion of improvements in the *qualitative*

Unprompted, the list of improvements do not come thick and fast, BUT....they do come, and include:

- introduction of green shopping bags
- improved regulation on businesses
- improved waterways through better controls on industry
- more fuel efficient cars
- reduced littering
- increased recycling
- emphasis on tree-planting
- energy saving globes
- community gardens

# Strictness of environmental regulations: 2012

## Nine sectors



*Q. The NSW government is responsible for enforcing rules which are intended to protect or improve the environment. I'll now read out a number of different groups in NSW and I'd like you to tell me if you feel that the environmental regulations that apply to these groups are much too strict, a bit too strict, about right, a bit too lax, or much too lax.*

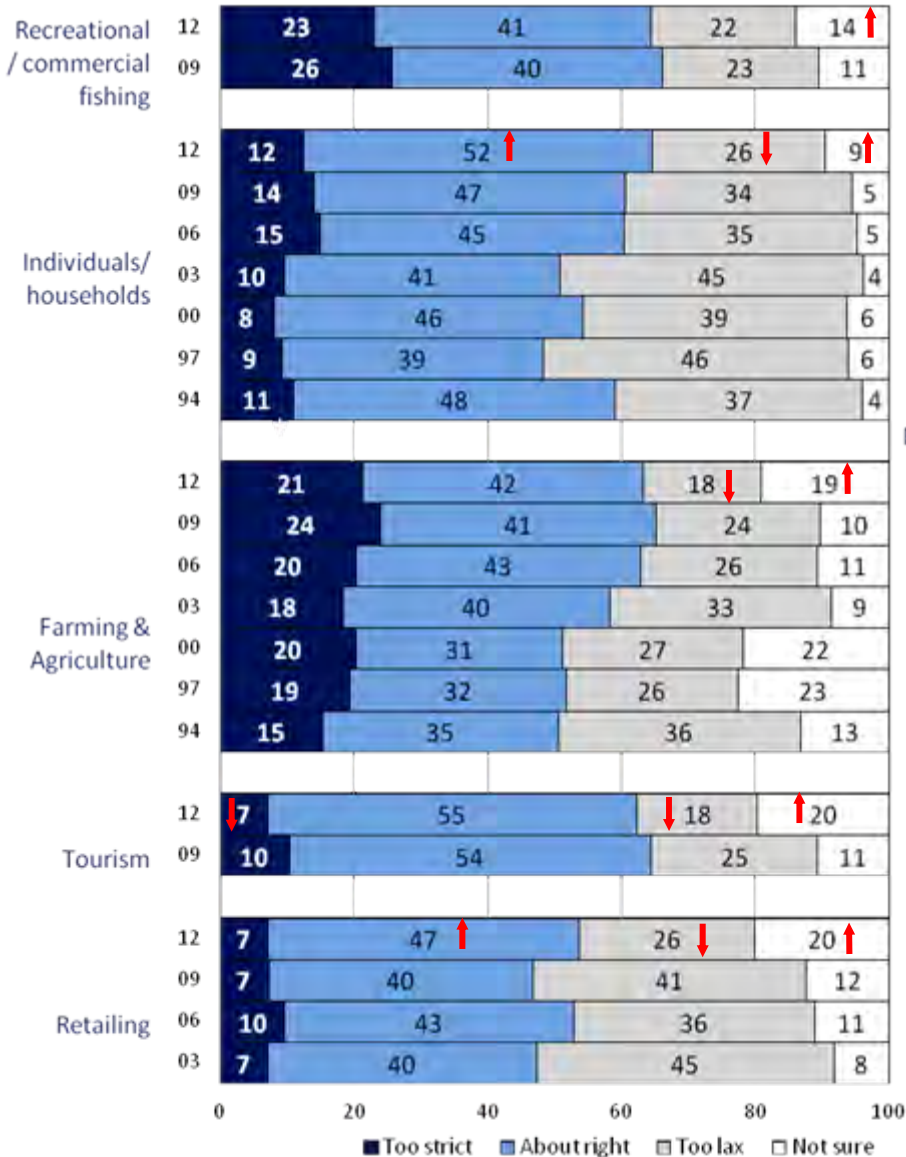
## Strictness of environmental regulations: 2009 - 2012

### Nine sectors



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# Strictness of environmental regulations



>40%  
about  
right

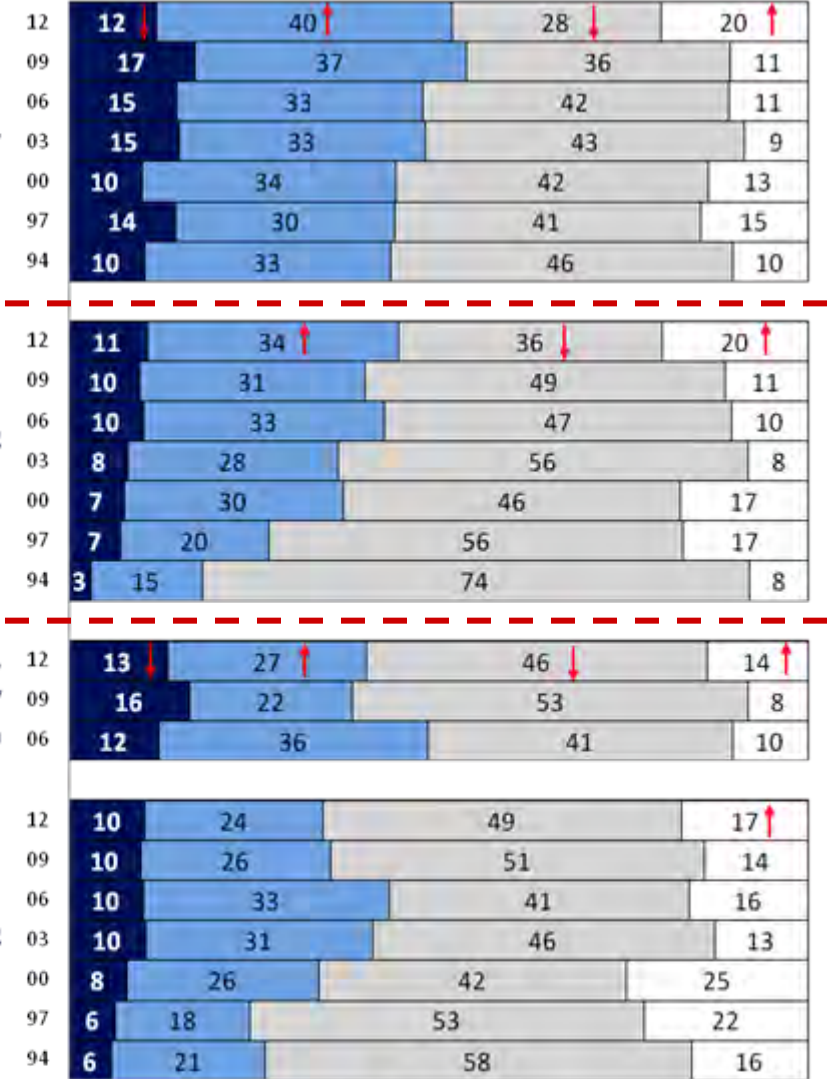
Manufacturing

Property  
dev't/  
construction

<20%

Mining

Percentage of respondents





# Strictness of environmental regulations – who says

## More likely to say ‘too strict’:

- People outside Sydney for: farming, forestry, property development and fishing
- Those with little or no concern, for seven sectors

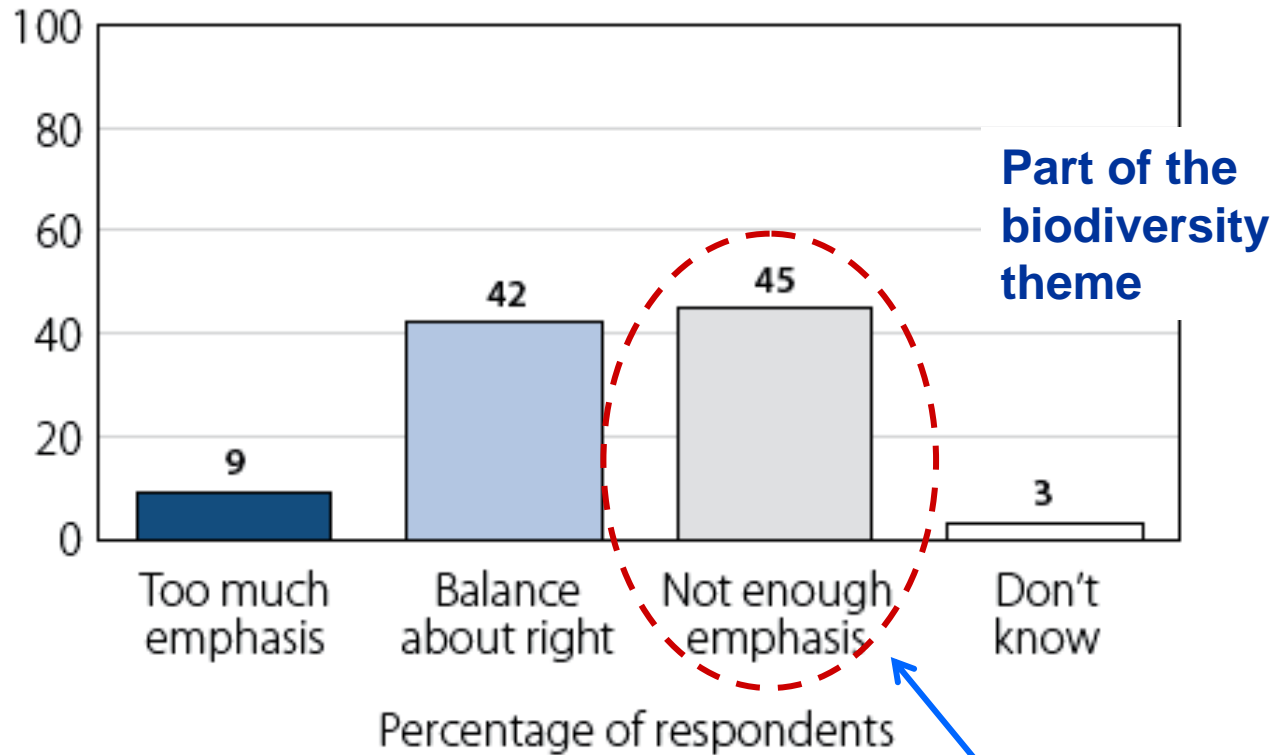
## More likely to say ‘too lax’:

- Those with high concern, for *all* sectors
- Those from Sydney Eastern/Inner Suburbs, for four sectors
- University-educated, for four sectors

## More likely to say ‘don’t know’:

- Women, for six sectors
- People 65+, for five sectors
- Those from multilingual households, for four sectors

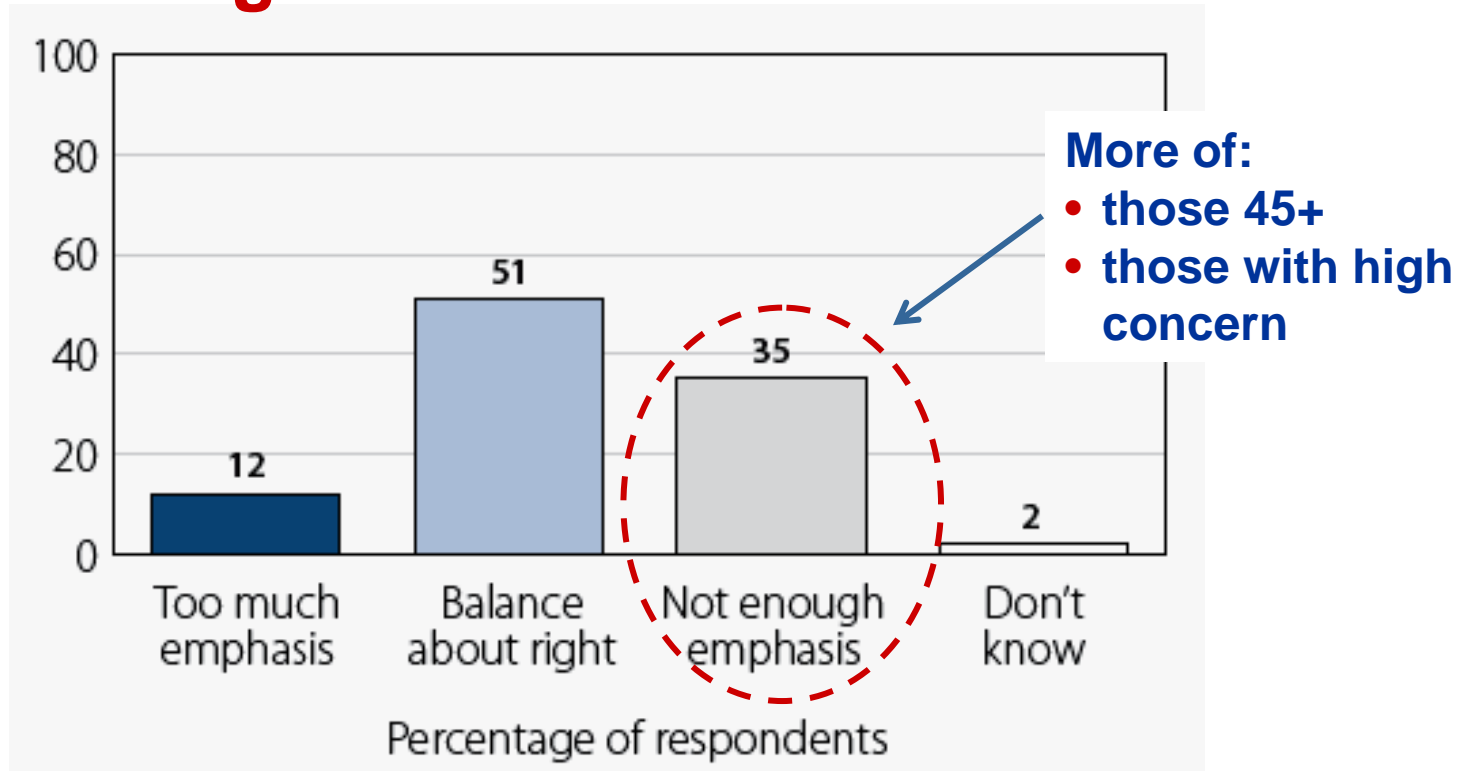
# Emphasis on protecting natural habitats



People with high or moderate concern

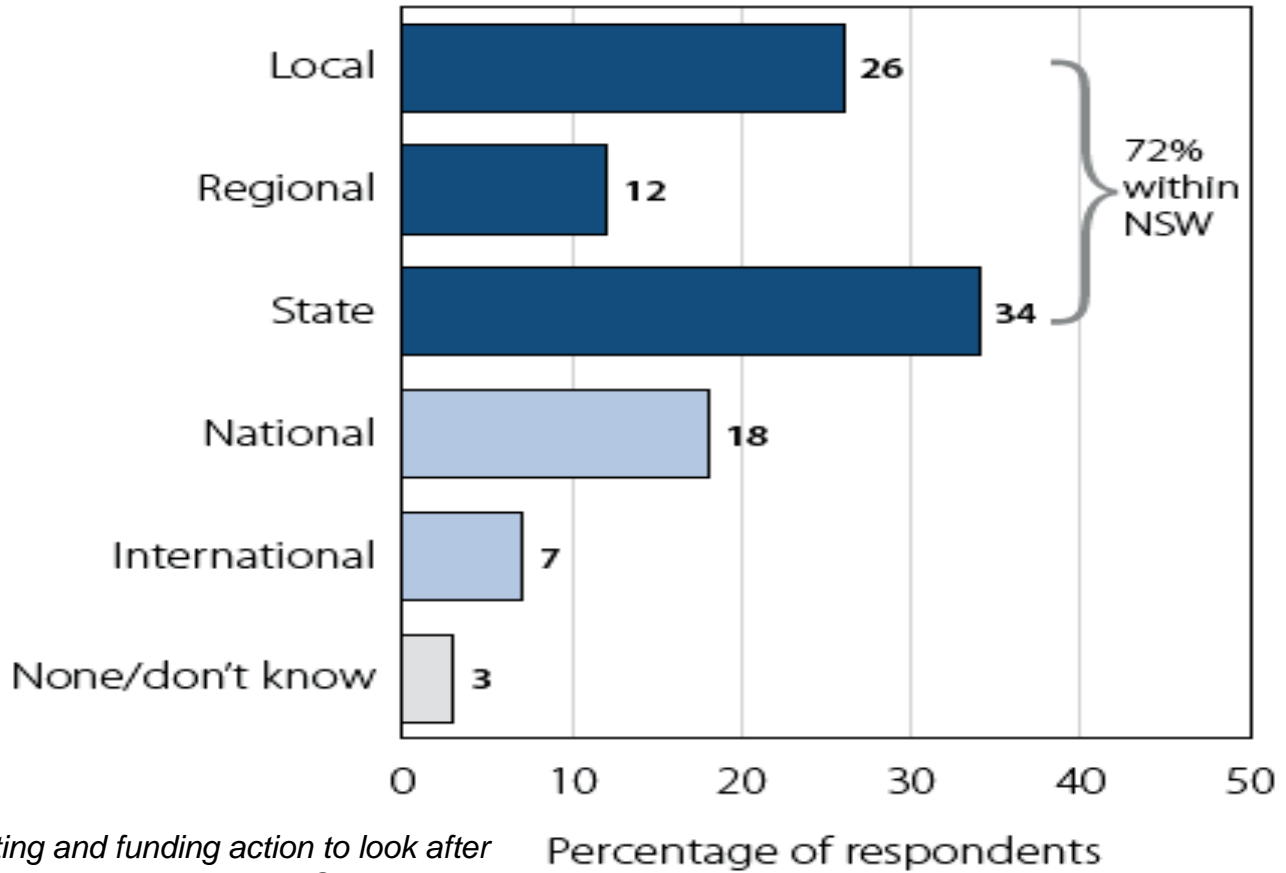
**New question** *There are various competing needs for the use of land in NSW. Sometimes decisions need to be made to either protect areas for natural habitats, or, to use the land for other needs. Overall, do you think there is... too much emphasis on protecting natural habitats; not enough emphasis on protecting natural habitats, or, do you think the balance is about right in NSW?*

## Emphasis on protecting and conserving historic things



**New question** And now thinking about population growth and development, and protecting and conserving historic buildings, places and items in NSW. Overall, do you think there is.... too much emphasis on protecting and conserving these historic things; not enough emphasis on protecting and conserving these historic things or, do you think the balance is about right in NSW?

# Geographic focus for environmental support and funding



**New question** *In supporting and funding action to look after the environment, at what level do you think the State Government should focus most effort? Should it be at... the local level; the regional level; the state level, the national level, the international level?*



# Findings III

## *Personal behaviour*

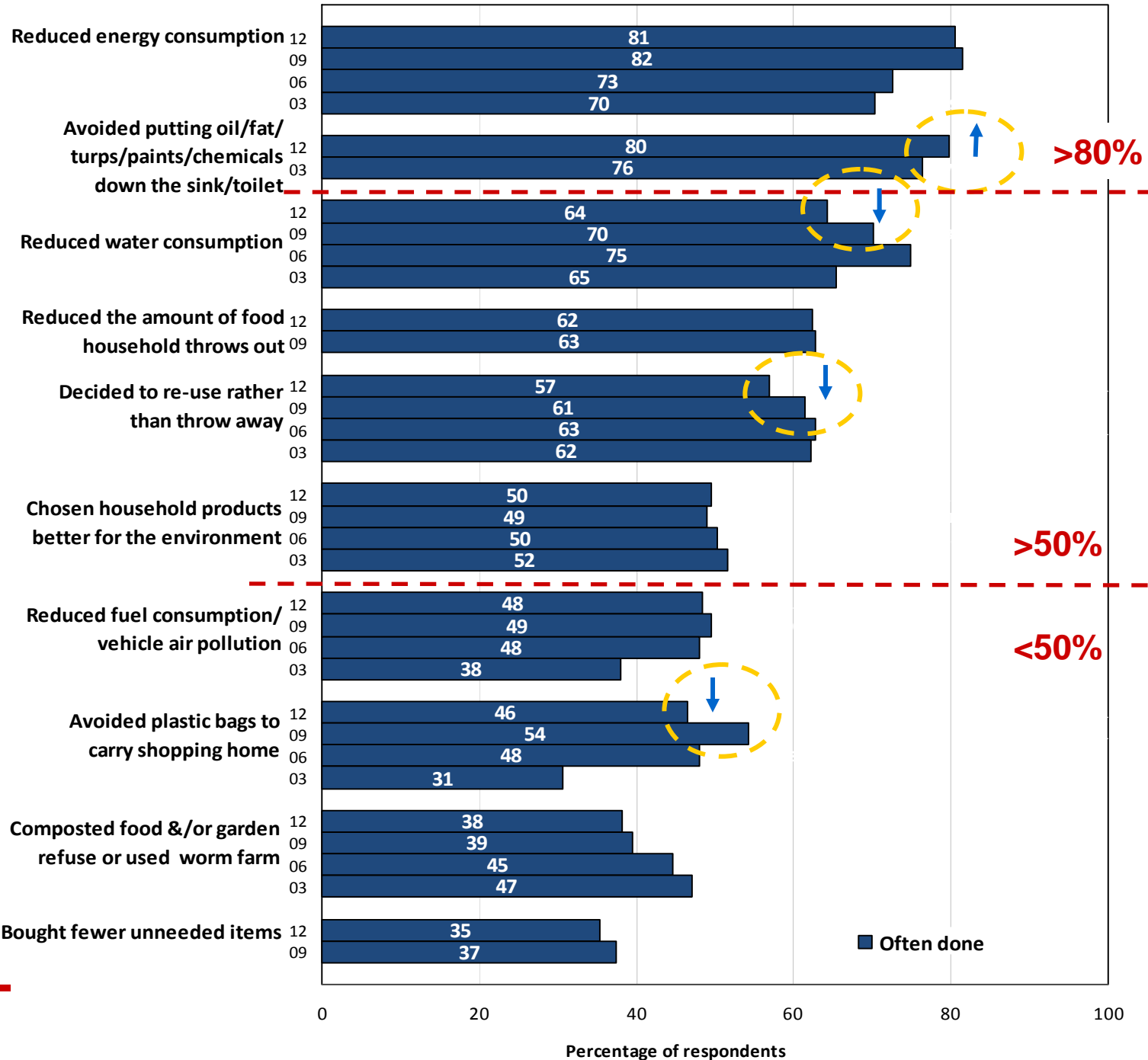
## ‘Everyday’ environmental behaviours - how many?

- Almost everyone (98%) has often done at least one of the ten in the past 12 months
- Average: 5.6
- Very few, 4%, have done all 10



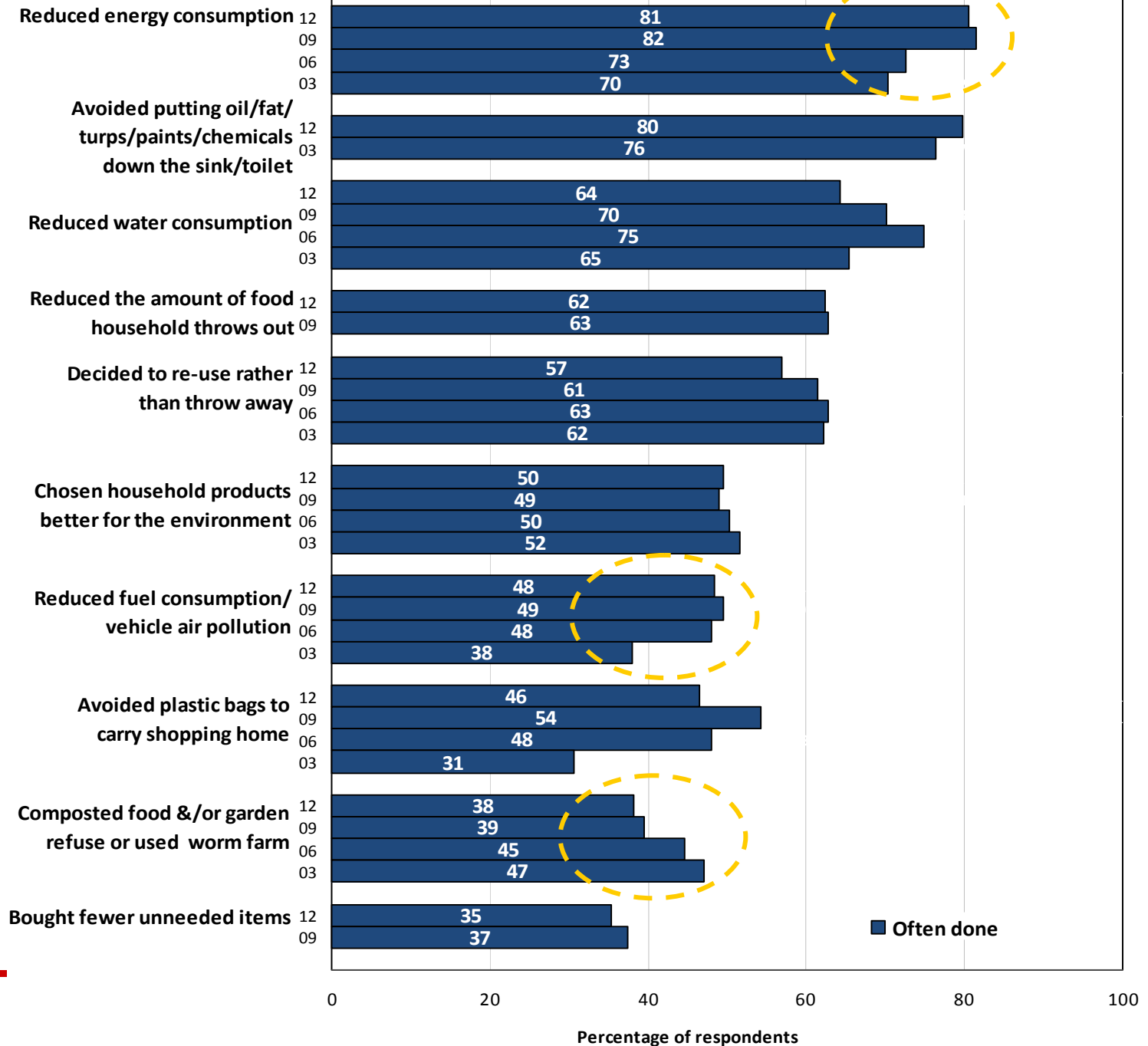
**Q.** From this next list of things I'll read out, can you please tell me, for each one, whether in the past 12 months you have often done that, sometimes done it, just occasionally done it, or never done that?

**'Everyday' behaviours - frequency**





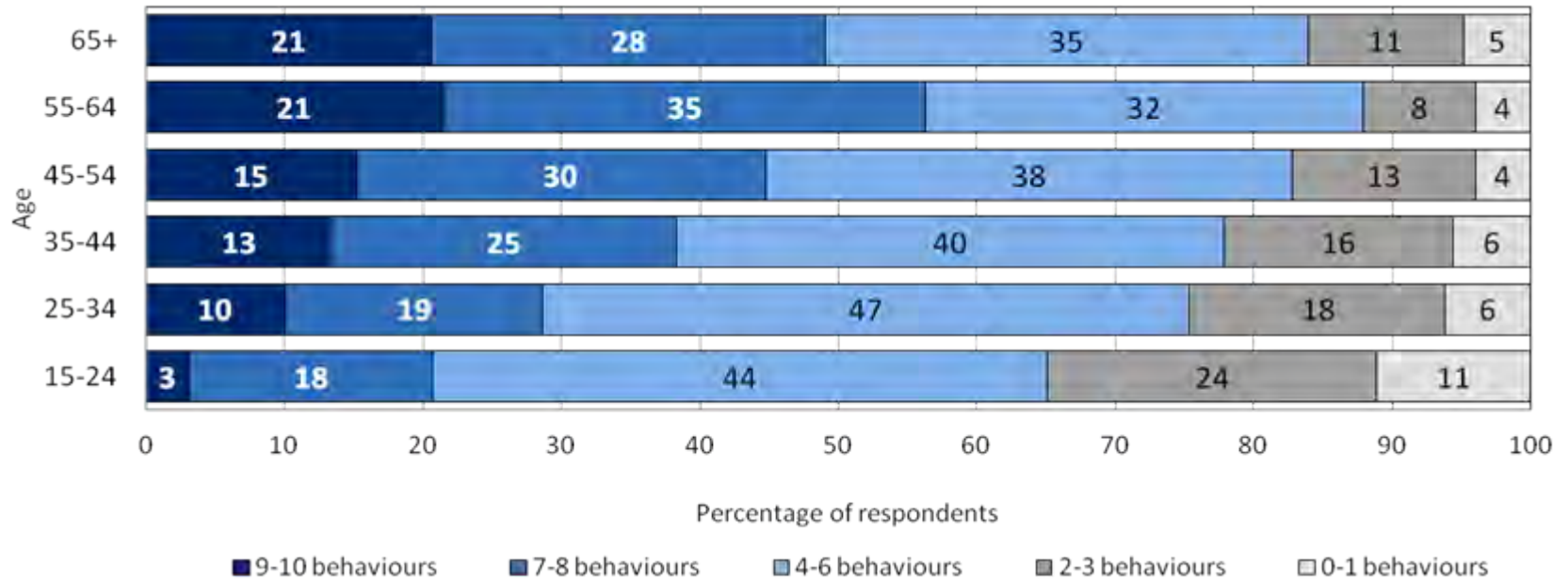
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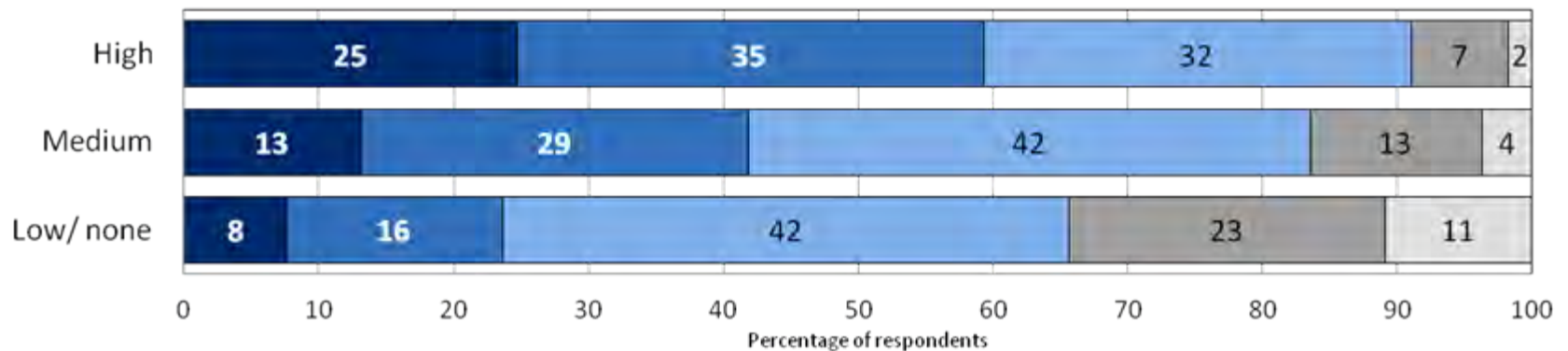
**‘Everyday’  
behaviours -  
frequency**

# 'Everyday' environmental behaviours – who?

## By age



## By environmental concern



# 'Everyday' environmental behaviours – why?

**Personal benefit**

*e.g. cost convenience*

**Enviro concern/ awareness**

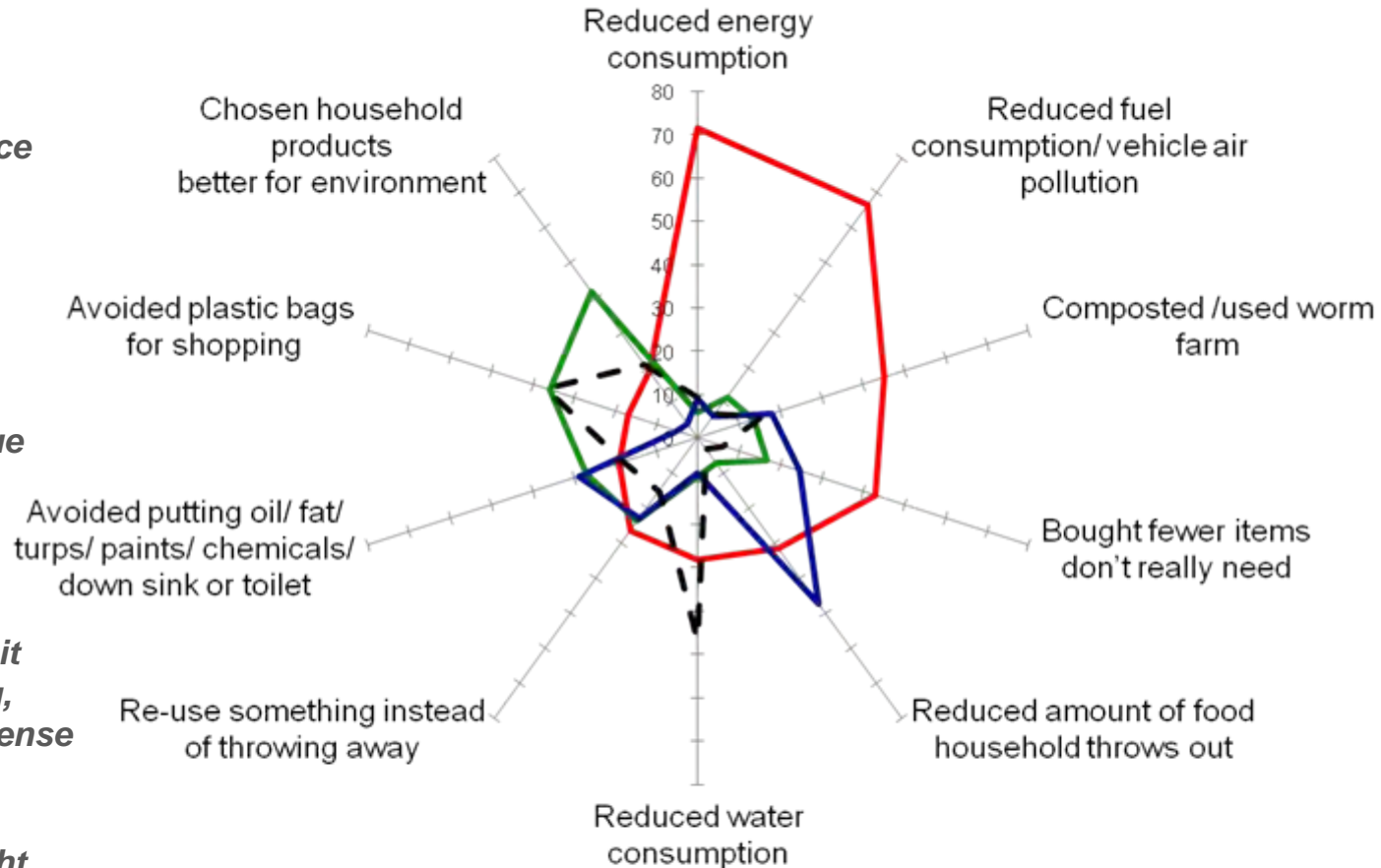
*general or specific enviro issue*

**Other values/ entrenched behaviours**

*e.g. dislike waste, habit upbringing, common sense*

**External influence/ enablers**

*e.g. drought, regulation, other people, education*



**Q.** You mentioned that you often or sometimes (insert behaviour). Can you please tell me what prompted you to start doing that? (If don't know: Can you tell me more generally then why you do that?)

## **‘Everyday’ behaviours – why? - changes**

### **Key changes compared with 2009:**

- ***Energy and water consumption:*** large increase in mentions of cost
- ***Buying household products better for environment:*** shift in emphasis away from education/advertising/media to environmental awareness/concern

# Main reasons for not undertaking behaviours

## Reasons

*Other things are more important/laziness  
Forgetfulness/lack of planning/habit*

*Lack of infrastructure  
Other external constraints*

*‘Doing what I can’/‘lack of opportunity’/‘already frugal’/‘don’t use or waste much’*

## For not...

- Avoiding plastic bags
- Choosing better household products
- Reducing energy consumption
- Composting/using a worm farm
- reducing fuel consumption
- Re-using items, buying fewer unneeded items,
- Reducing water consumption, and
- Reducing the amount of food thrown out

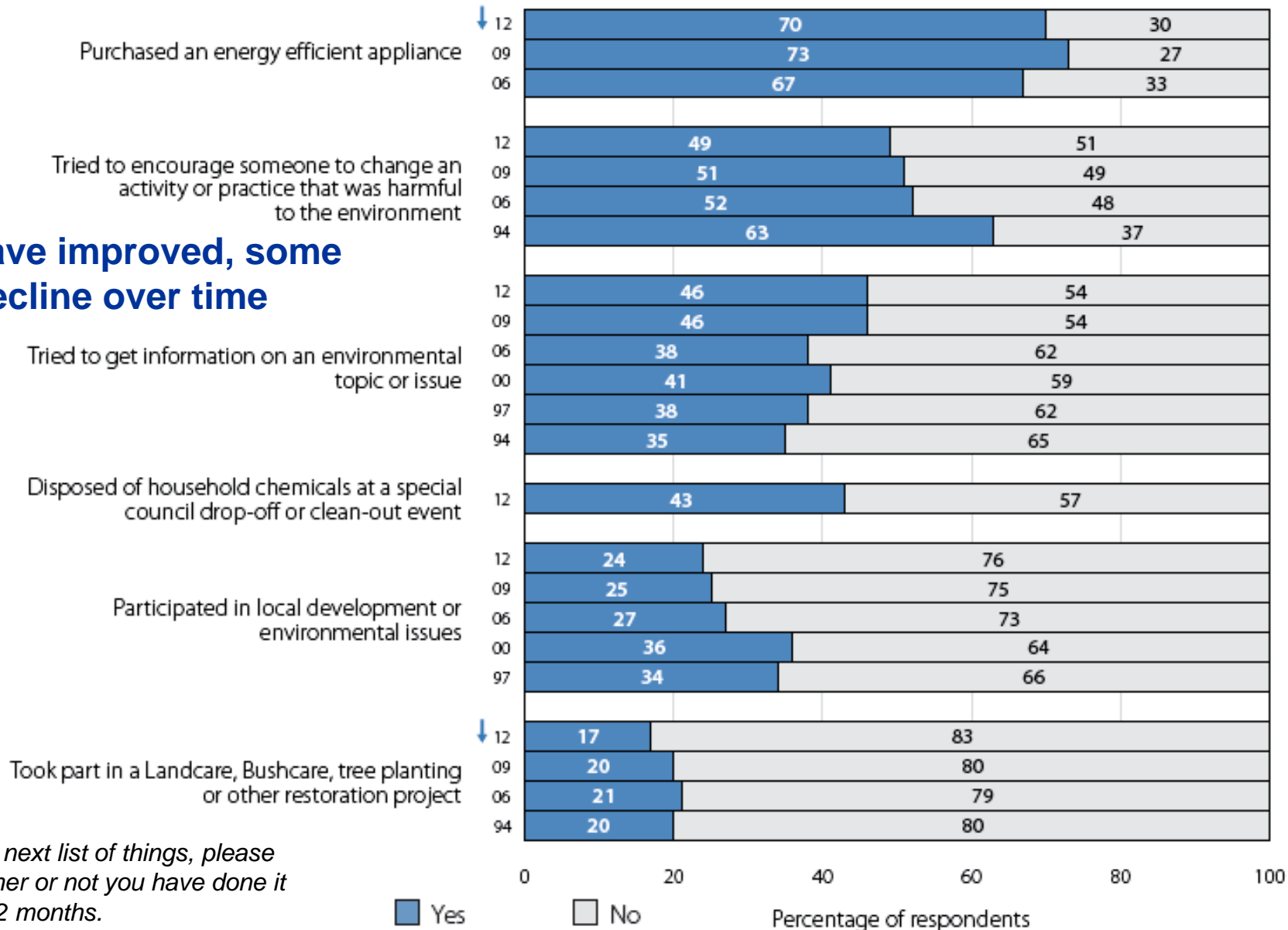
## Compared to 2009:

- More cite *forgetfulness/inattentiveness* for not reducing energy consumption, more also find this difficult to do

Q. You mentioned that you never, or just occasionally .....  
Is there any particular reason you don't do that more often, or find it difficult to do?

# Participation in occasional environmental activities

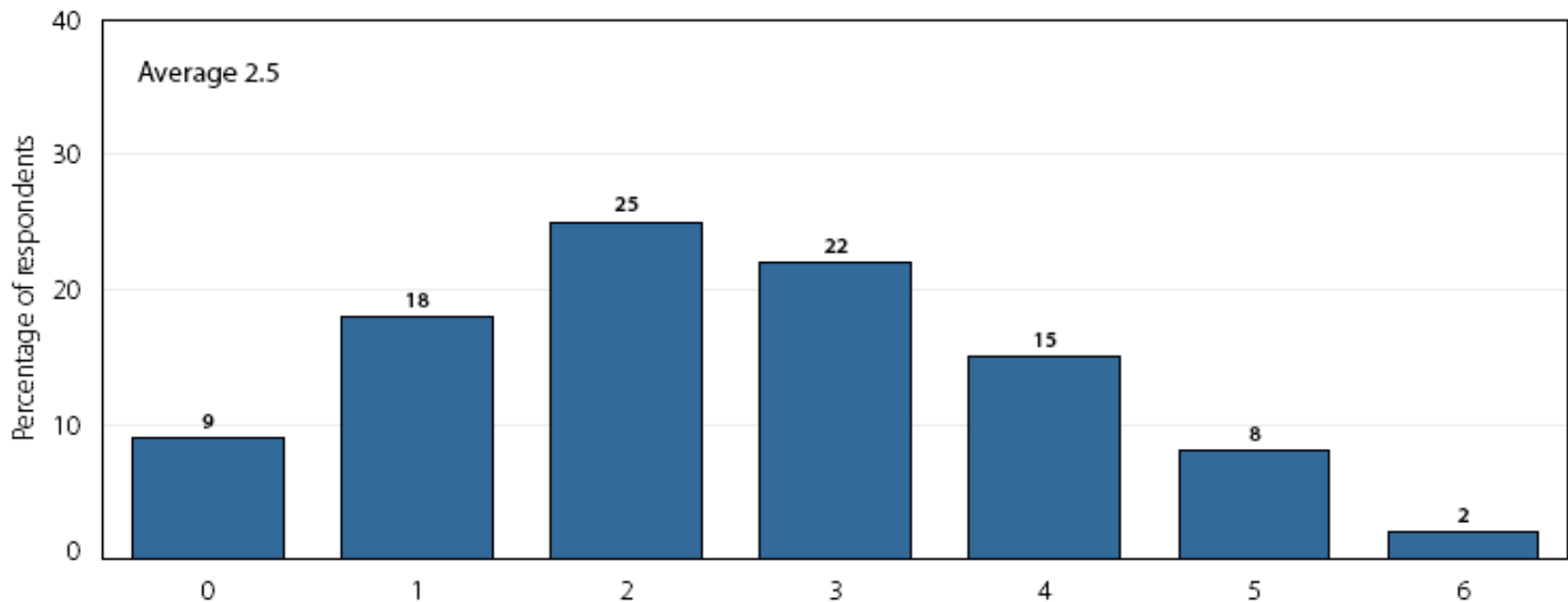
**None have improved, some show decline over time**



**Q.** From this next list of things, please tell me whether or not you have done it in the past 12 months.

## Occasional environmental activities – how many?

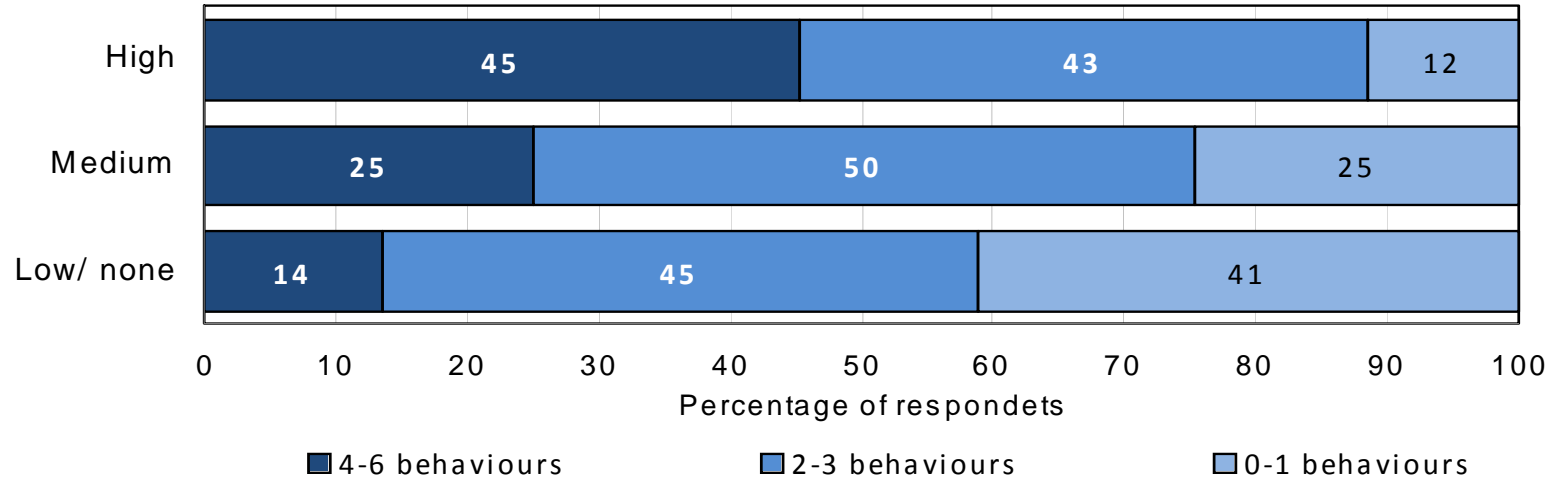
- Most, 91%, have participated in at least one
- Very few, 2%, have done all six
- 52% have done less than half
- Average 2.5





# Occasional environmental activities – who?

## By environmental concern



## Average number of activities rises with age, up to 64

### More likely:

- People outside Sydney: to have bought a energy efficient appliance, and taken part in Landcare/Bushcare or other restoration project
- People from multi-lingual households: tried to get information on an environmental topic
- Those with a degree: participated in local issue, tried to get information, encourage someone to change what they were doing

# Occasional environmental activities – why?

**Enviro concern/  
awareness/  
interest**

*General, or  
specific enviro  
issue*

**Other  
values**

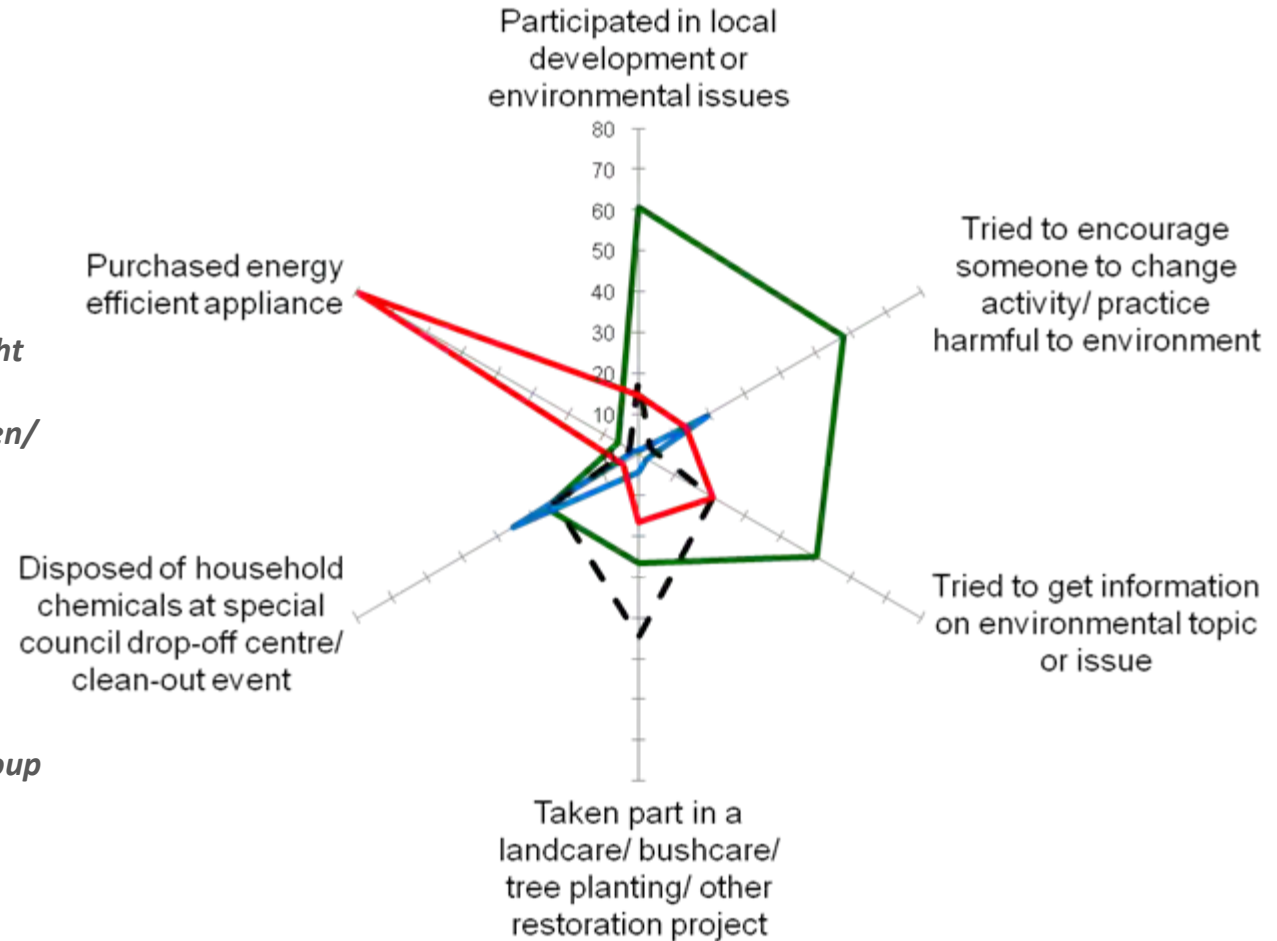
*e.g. 'do the right  
thing',  
educate children/  
others,  
safety*

**External  
influence/  
enablers**

*e.g.  
regulation,  
school, work,  
other people,  
community group*

**Personal  
benefit**

*e.g. cost,  
benefit own  
property*



## From the qualitative research

### Behavioural drivers

#### Primary

Some combination of:

- cost
- ‘saving’ the environment
- ethical: ‘do the right thing’

#### Less prominent

- for future generations
- feels good
- making a difference

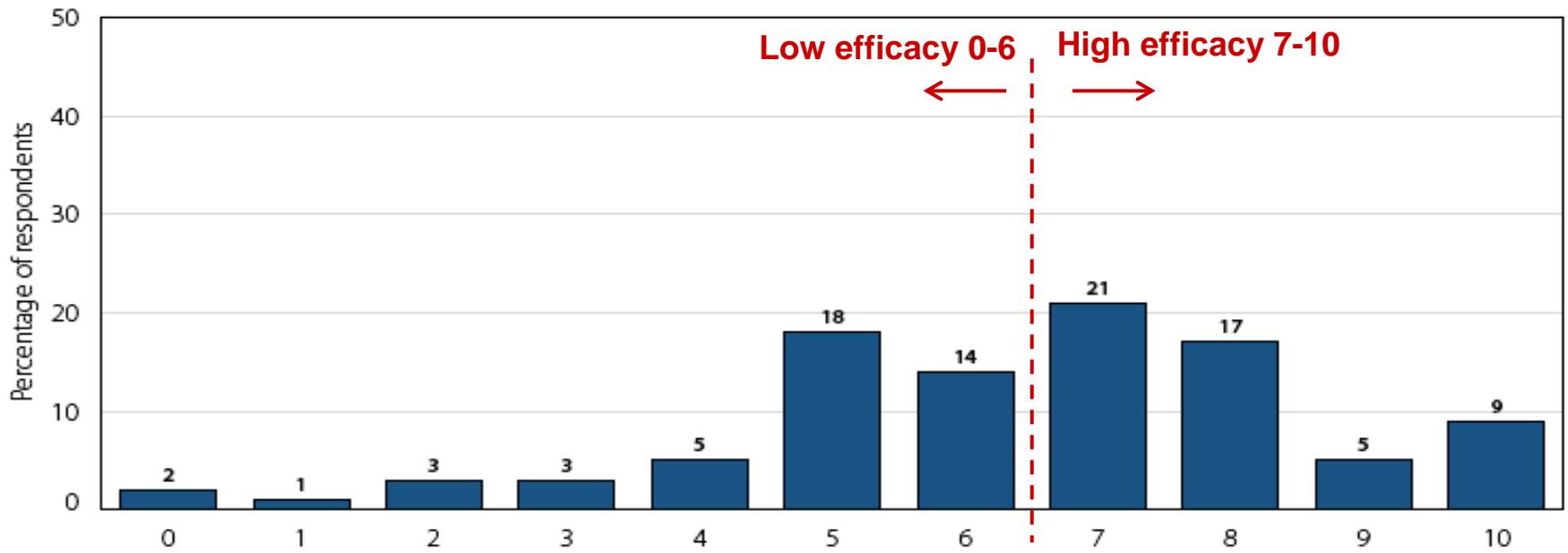
If it is easy to be environmentally friendly, and there is not too much effort/ inconvenience/ time/ cost, then actions do occur, but....

### Barriers

- If the required effort/ inconvenience/ time/ cost raises beyond a certain threshold, personal commitment to ‘doing the right thing’ wanes.
- Threshold probably varies from person to person, but it appears to be fairly low for most

## Perceived efficacy – does what you do make a difference?

- Self rating – only 15% 0-4; a third (32%) sit in the middle 5-6
- A little over half high 7-10 – more women and 55-64s
- Those with high concern 74%, medium 56%, little/no concern 36%



**Q.** Thinking about any of the things you may do connected with the environment.....Where would you put yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means you strongly believe what you personally do makes a difference to the environment, and 0 means what you personally do makes no difference at all?

## Does efficacy affect behaviour?

Ten 'everyday' behaviours:

Efficacy of 0-4 = av.3.8  efficacy 9-10 = av. 7.0

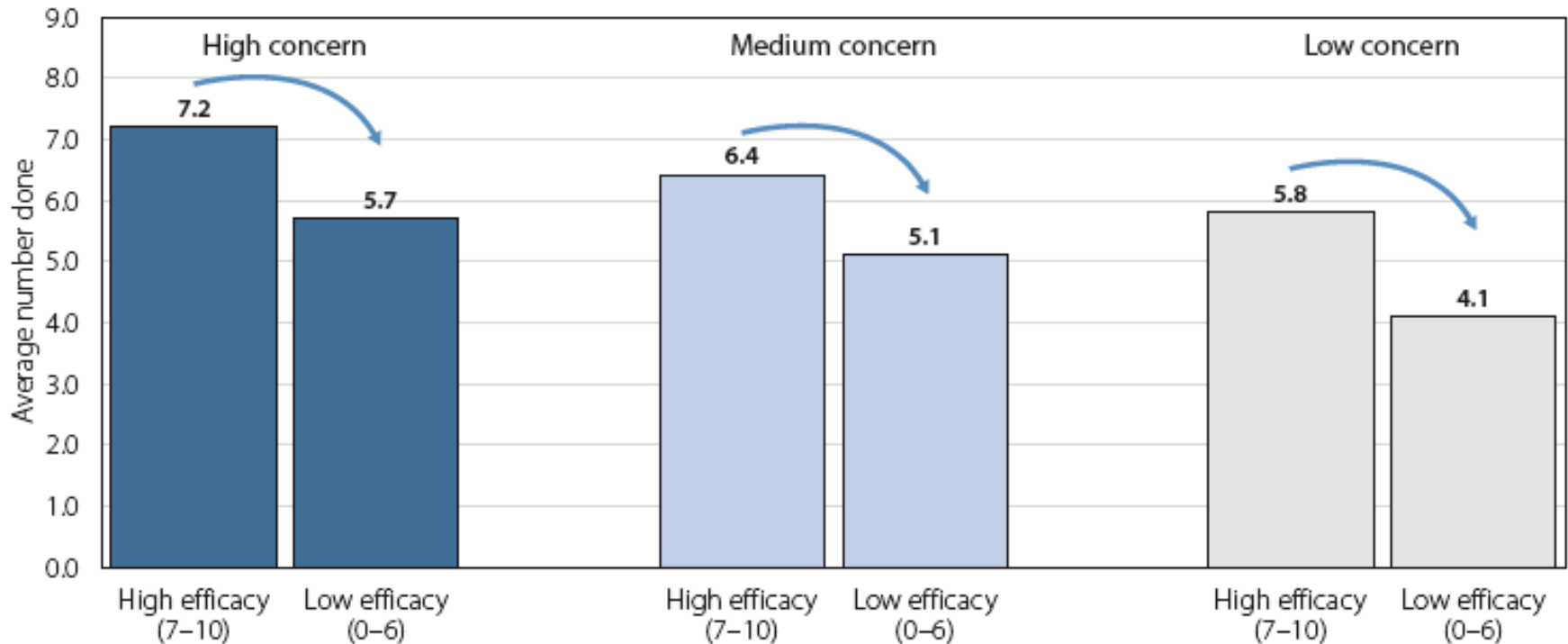
Six occasional behaviours:

Efficacy of 0-4 = av.1.7  efficacy 9-10 = av. 3.1

## Concern, efficacy and behaviour - relationships

- Higher concern = doing more
- Higher efficacy = doing more
- But this is partly because:  
    higher concern = higher efficacy
- So let's look at this a bit more closely. . . .

## Relationship between no. of 'everyday' behaviours done often, concern and efficacy



The pattern is the same for  
'occasional activities'

Perceived efficacy makes  
a difference at every level  
of concern



## What comes first – what causes what?

- It's easy to imagine that concern about environmental problems can motivate behaviour
- But the causal direction between efficacy and behaviour is less clear:

*Is it:*      efficacy → action

*Or is it:* external factor → action → efficacy

- Probably *both* operate in the community in different situations and among different people

## From the qualitative research...

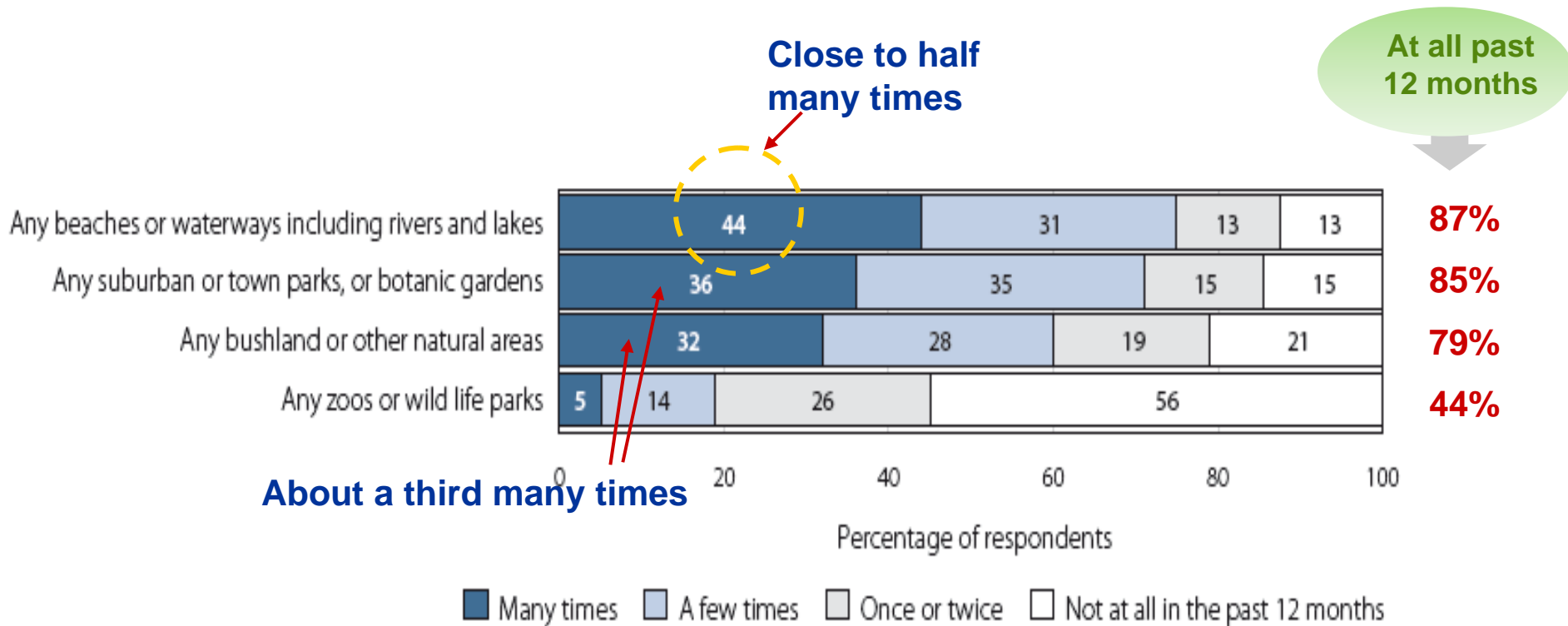
- Most thought their actions made a difference, and this assisted motivation. Many needed to believe what they do makes a difference – otherwise, why bother?
- Related: there's a feeling that there's a lack of feedback about outcomes – what's the 'reward' for doing these things?
- Yet the efficacy argument is also used interchangeably to support both pro- and anti-environmental behaviours, as required:
  - *I do it: it makes a difference*
  - *I don't do it: it doesn't matter because it makes no difference*

Implications?

## Conclusions on perceived efficacy

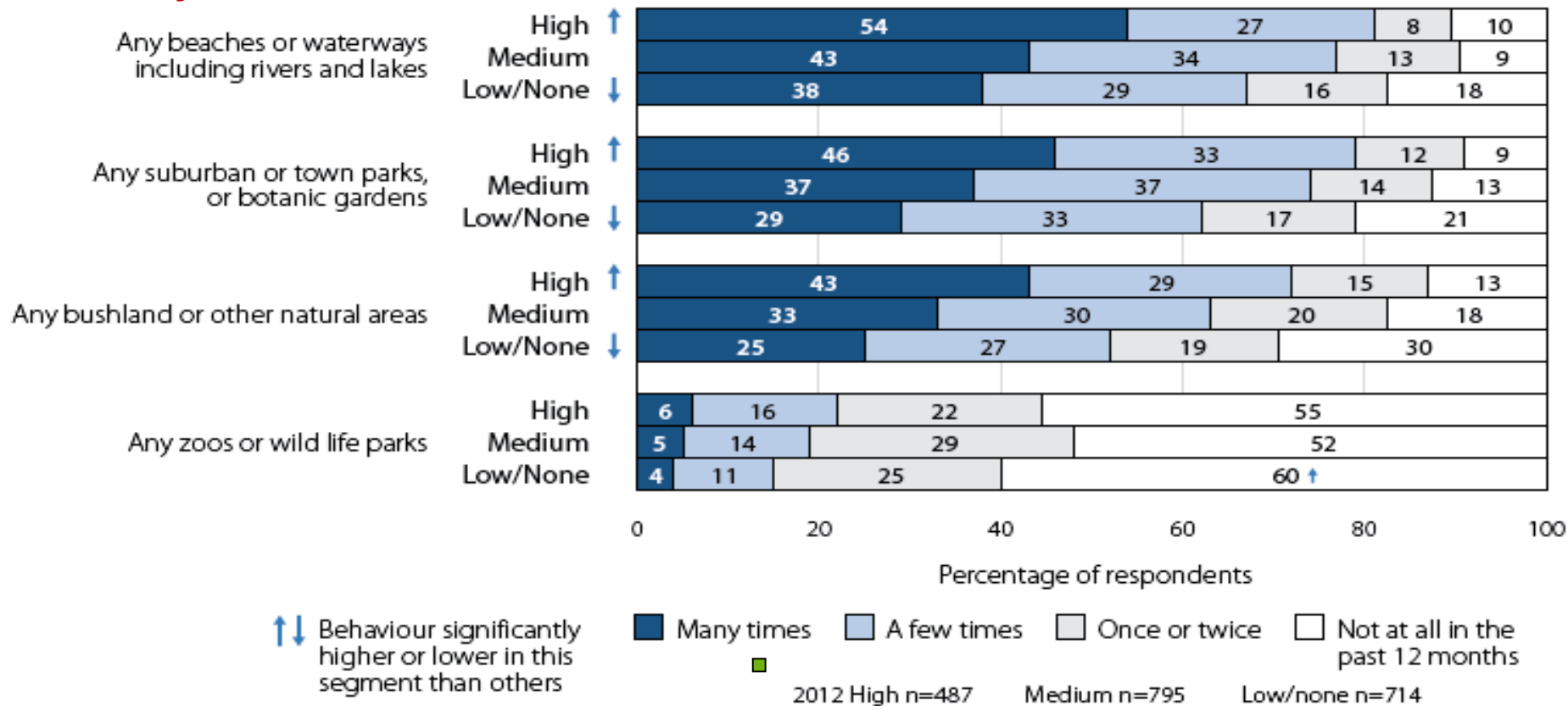
- Clear statistical relationship - but direction of causation is ambiguous
- Efficacy may not be a *primary* driver, but it is worth thinking about
- It relates to actions within control of ordinary people in everyday lives – as opposed to environmental issues and solutions that individuals may feel they can do nothing about
- Communicated the right way, it could provide the pay-off or reward for ‘doing the right thing’; reinforce the value of individual actions, encourage more / more frequent pro-environmental behaviours

## Visitation to environmental locations in the past 12 months



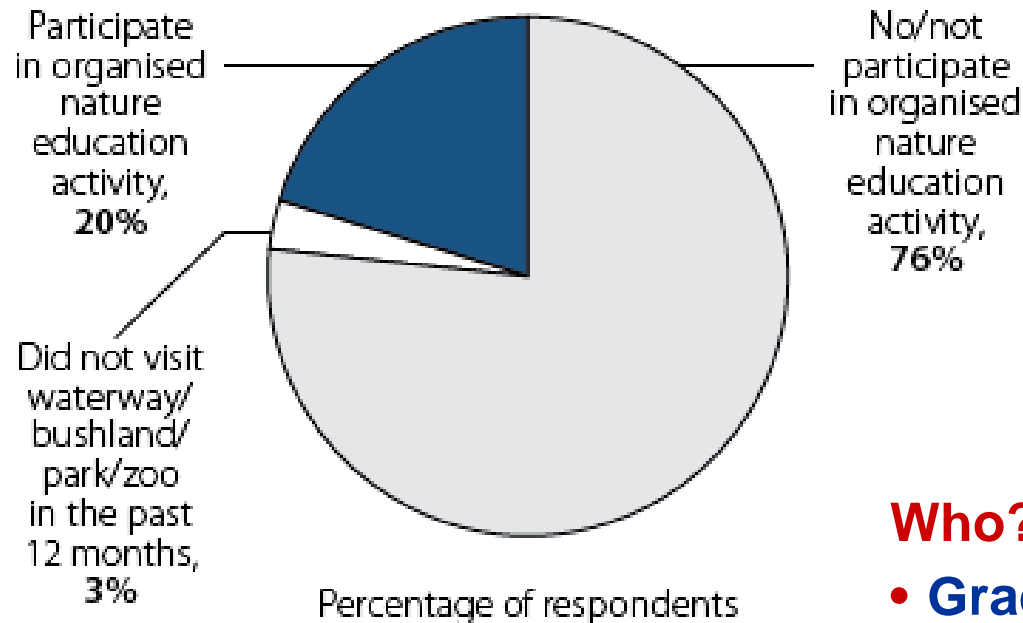
**New Question** *In the past 12 months, how often, if ever, have you visited or spent time at each of the following sorts of places? Would it be many times, a few times, once or twice, or not at all in the past 12 months?*

## By concern



- People with children more likely to have visited all locations many times
- Location and proximity important factors
- People from English-only households more likely to have visited bushland and beaches/waterways many times

## Participation in organised nature education activities



### Who?

- **Graduates**
- **Those with high concern**

**New Question** *When you visited any of these places in the past 12 months, did you take part in any organised nature education activity, such as a guided walk, talk, wildlife show or eco-tour?*



# Conclusions



## In summary – the big themes

### People are more positive about the environment:

- More positive on environmental indicators, particularly in water flows and water quality in rivers
- Environment mentioned less as priority for the NSW Government
- Less concern about regulations being too lax
- Those concerned about environmental problems is decreasing

### Unlike previous surveys, there is no dominant environmental ‘problem’ – instead several issues:

- water supply/conservation drought (*down a lot*)
- mining (*up a lot*)
- air pollution/ air quality (*the default option?*)
- Waste

### Climate change has declined as a top-of-mind issue:

- 2009: high visibility
- 2012: conflicting views, highly politicised, carbon tax

## In summary (cont.)....

A number of findings illustrate interest in and concern about biodiversity issues:

- Protecting vegetation and wildlife is the top initiative for government action
- Need for more emphasis on protecting natural habitats
- Steady growth in 'maintaining ecosystems' as reason for concern

Evidence of further gradual improvement in knowledge

For most behaviour items, there is no change:

- Qualitative indicates environment behaviours embedded in in everyday life
- But slippage in: avoiding plastic bags, reducing water consumption, reusing things, and participation in restoration activities

There are strong relationships relating to concern, efficacy and behaviours

- Concern is related to many measures incl. knowledge, behaviours and a range of environmental views
- Perceived efficacy relates to both concern and behaviours, notably people who think their actions make a difference do more, whatever their level of concern.



# How to find out more

- Research products
  - Main report (survey plus qualitative summary)
  - *Who Cares? at a Glance*
  - Seminar presentation
  - *Who Cares? - Qualitative report*
  - Segment highlights
  - Spreadsheet of cross-tabulated data

See: [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/community/whocares.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/community/whocares.htm)

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