

International Social Survey Programme

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) involves leading academic institutions in 47 countries in an annual survey of economic and social policy issues. New Zealand is represented in the ISSP by Massey University. Each year the ISSP member countries carry out a 30-minute survey using the same questionnaire. The data from these surveys are deposited in a central archive in Cologne where they are freely available to all members. This collection of data enables researchers to examine similarities and differences between countries, and to monitor changes over time.

The ISSP addresses a different topic each year in a roughly seven-year cycle. Previous topics have included social inequality, the roles of men and women in society, social networks, religion, citizenship, work orientation, national identity and sport and leisure. In 2010, the nineteenth year New Zealand has been involved in the ISSP, the topic was the Environment, a repeat of surveys previously conducted in 1993 and 2000.

Survey Details

Between August and November 2010, a nationwide mail survey was conducted of 2520 people aged 18 and over, randomly selected from the New Zealand Electoral Roll. The survey produced 1172 valid responses, an effective response rate of 48%. A sample of this size has a maximum error margin at the 95% confidence level of approximately plus or minus 3%.

Though the sample was representative of a wide spectrum of New Zealand society, young people were under-represented and women were over-represented. To correct these biases the survey data were weighted so that the age-sex distribution of the sample matched that of the New Zealand population. As well as questioning respondents about the environment, the survey also asked for their views on the Emissions Trading Scheme and mining of conservation land.

Concern for the Environment

Most New Zealanders (70%) are concerned about the environment, but this concern has to be seen in the context of other important national issues. Only 9% of those surveyed considered the environment to be the most important issue for New Zealand in 2010, putting it behind the economy (most important for 32% of respondents), health care (22%), education (14%) and crime (14%). Though this result reflects the global financial crisis and deep recession in the New Zealand economy at the time,

it does suggest that the environment is not a major issue for many New Zealanders, despite their expressed concern for it.

A quarter of those surveyed regarded water pollution in rivers, lakes and beaches as the most important environmental problem for New Zealand (see Table 1). Around half this number believe chemicals and pesticides (14%), using up our natural resources (13%), climate change (13%), and domestic waste disposal (12%) are the greatest environmental problem for the country.

Table 1: Threats to the environment

Most important environmental problem	NZ as a whole %	Personally %
Water pollution	25	12
Chemicals and pesticides	14	14
Using up our natural resources	13	7
Climate change	13	9
Domestic waste disposal	12	17
Water shortage	6	6
Air pollution	4	7
Genetically modified foods	4	7
Nuclear waste	1	0
None of these	2	13
Can't choose	6	8

However, the environmental problem that affects New Zealanders and their families most is domestic waste disposal (17%), followed by chemicals and pesticides (14%), water pollution (12%) and climate change (9%). Around 7% of respondents said the problem that affects them and their family most is using up our natural resources, water shortage, air pollution, or genetically modified foods; but 13% said that none of the environmental problems mentioned affected them. Thus, the perception of environmental issues and their effects differs depending on whether the perspective is national or personal. However, respondents generally felt they knew more about the causes of environmental problems than about their solutions.

Protecting the Environment

Many New Zealanders make an effort to protect the environment; 53% of our respondents agreed they do the right thing for the environment even when it costs more money or takes more time. Virtually all New Zealanders (98%) make some effort to sort glass or tins or plastic or newspapers for recycling (see Figure 1). And the proportion that always recycles has increased from 40% in 2000 to 73% in 2010.

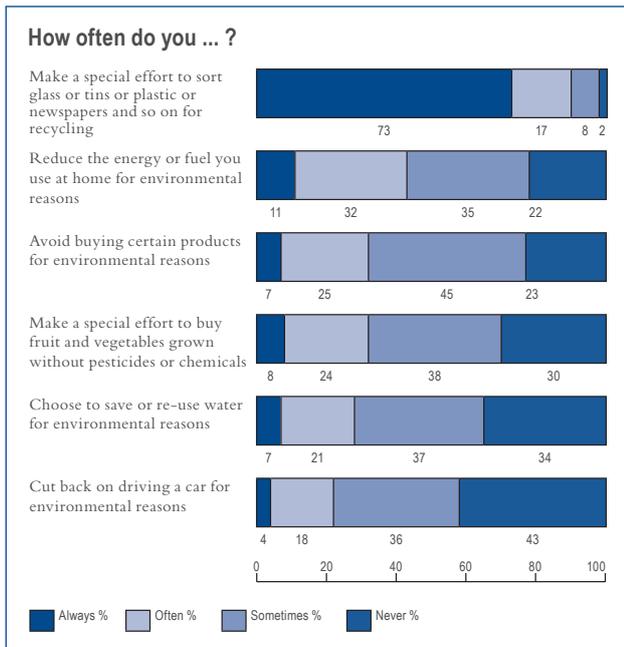


Figure 1: Actions to protect the environment

The prevalence of other actions to protect the environment is less widespread. While 43% of respondents often or always reduce domestic energy or fuel consumption for environmental reasons, only one-third make a special effort to buy fruit and vegetables grown without pesticides or chemicals, or avoid buying certain products for environmental reasons. Less than 30% often or always choose to save or re-use water or cut back on driving a car for environmental reasons.

New Zealanders are also less involved in some environmental protection activities now than they were ten years ago. Thirty seven percent of our respondents had signed a petition about an environmental issue in the last five years (45% in 2000) and 26% had given money to an environmental group (30% in 2000). However, 10% were members of an environmental group whose aim is to preserve or protect the environment and 5% had taken part in a protest or demonstration about an environmental issue in the last five years, and these levels are similar to those in 2000.

The general reduction in participation in environmental activities has been accompanied by a similar decline in the willingness of New Zealanders to pay for protecting the environment (see Figure 2). Thirty eight percent of respondents would be willing to pay much higher prices to protect the environment, but this figure is down from 45% in 2000. Similarly, though 24% were willing to pay much higher taxes to protect the environment, this was 7% less than in 2000. Only the proportion willing to accept cuts in their standard of living has remained the same over the last decade at 33%. Meanwhile, the proportions unwilling to

accept much higher prices and higher taxes have increased by eight and 12 percentage points, respectively, between 2000 and 2010.

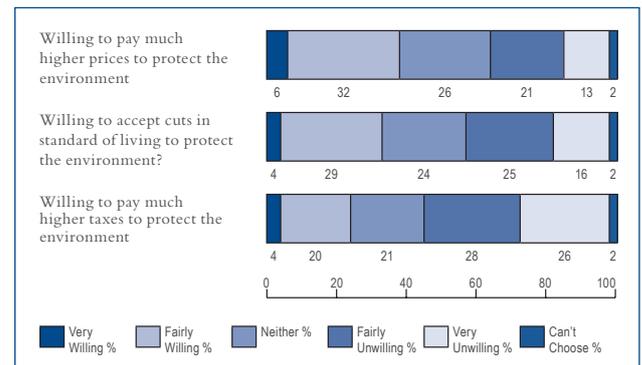


Figure 2: Willingness to pay for environmental protection

Most respondents (67%) agreed that the earth simply cannot continue to support population growth at its present rate, and 40% believe economic progress in New Zealand will slow down unless we look after the environment (see Figure 3). Paradoxically, 47% of those surveyed also agreed that New Zealand needs economic growth to protect the environment. Another apparent contradiction is the widespread belief that almost everything we do in modern life harms the environment, but that economic growth does not always harm the environment (both beliefs held by 53% of respondents).

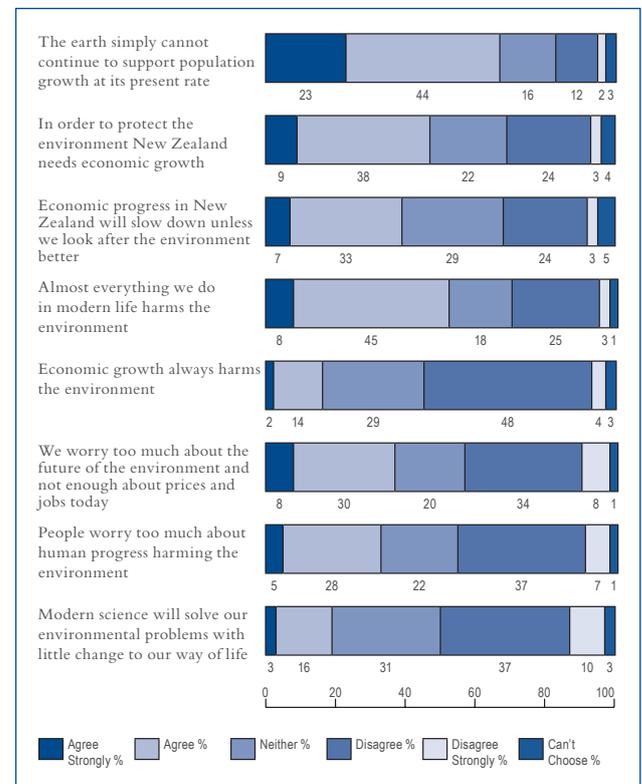


Figure 3: The effects of economic growth and progress

Some New Zealanders (38%) believe we worry too much about the future of the environment and not enough about

prices and jobs today, worry too much about human progress harming the environment (33%), and that modern science will solve our environmental problems with little change to our way of life (19%). But most New Zealanders disagree with these sentiments and instead express doubts about the effect of growth and progress on the environment.

The Government's Role

Most New Zealanders believe the government should legislate to protect the environment. Fifty three percent believe the government should pass laws to make ordinary people protect the environment, even if this interferes with people's rights to make their own decisions, and 77% believe the government should pass laws to make businesses protect the environment, even if it interferes with businesses' rights to make their own decisions.

To get New Zealanders and their families to protect the environment, those surveyed favoured providing more information and education for people about the advantages of protecting the environment (50%), but there was also strong support for using the tax system to reward people who protect the environment (31%) and heavy fines for those who damage the environment (16%). To get New Zealand business and industry to protect the environment respondents favoured using the tax system to reward businesses that protect the environment (39%), followed by heavy fines for businesses that damage the environment (29%) and more information and education (28%).

As far as current legislation is concerned, 34% of those surveyed consider that environmental laws and regulations as they are now applied in New Zealand do not go far enough, 27% consider they strike the right balance, while 22% believe they go too far (18% don't know). This represents a 10 percentage point change since 2000 in the balance of opinion about the extent of our environmental laws. Fewer New Zealanders now believe these laws do not go far enough and more believe they go too far.

More generally, 44% of respondents believe that New Zealand is doing about the right amount to protect the world environment compared to other countries, and 20% consider we are doing more than enough; but 28% think we are doing too little (7% don't know). Nevertheless, most respondents (70%) agreed there should be international agreements for environmental problems that New Zealand and other countries should be made to follow.

Most respondents (75%) believe solar, wind or water power should be the priority for meeting New Zealand's future energy needs, but 10% believe nuclear power should be given priority. Smaller numbers favour coal, oil and natural gas (7%) or fuels made from crops (3%) as the highest priority.

Climate Change and the ETS

Forty four percent of those surveyed agreed that the environment was seriously endangered by a rise in the world's temperature caused by climate change. However, this was less than the proportion who felt the same about pollution of rivers, lakes and streams (68%), industrial air pollution (56%), nuclear power stations (49%) or pesticides and chemicals used in farming (49%). It is also less than the 58% of respondents in 2000 who shared the same view about climate change being extremely or very dangerous for the environment.

Nevertheless, climate change was ranked fourth in terms of environmental problems facing New Zealand, and most respondents (57%) believe New Zealand should take strong action on climate change now regardless of what other countries are doing (30% believe we should wait until we see what other countries are doing before taking action and 14% don't know). In fact, since 2008 New Zealand has had an Emissions Trading Scheme, designed to reduce carbon emissions and make carbon emitters pay for these. However, on 1 July 2010 costs of the scheme began to be passed on to New Zealand consumers in the form of higher prices for many goods and services that create carbon emissions and this increased public awareness of the scheme.

Despite the fact that the Emissions Trading Scheme has been in force since 1 January 2008, 58% of respondents agreed they had little or no understanding of the scheme; only 17% believed they understood it well or very well. This low level of understanding of the Emissions Trading Scheme is reflected in the 33% of those surveyed who responded "Can't choose" when asked if they were in favour of or opposed to the scheme. Twenty nine percent of respondents were opposed to the Emissions Trading Scheme, 17% were in favour and 22% were neither in favour or opposed to it.

Half of those surveyed agreed that the Emissions Trading Scheme is an important signal to our trading partners that New Zealand supports efforts to reduce greenhouse gases, and nearly 40% believe the Emissions Trading Scheme is a step in the right direction towards reducing greenhouse gases (see Figure 4). But more than 30% believe the Emissions Trading Scheme is penalising New Zealanders unnecessarily (34%) and that the scheme will have no effect on global climate change (32%). Around 20% of respondents disagree with these views; however, opinions on the Emissions Trading Scheme are characterised by high proportions of "Can't choose" and neutral responses (40% to 45% in each case).



Figure 4: The Emissions Trading Scheme

Mining and Conservation

In 2010, the National Government proposed removing the highest level of conservation protection (called Schedule 4) from 70 square kilometres of land in five areas, so applications for exploration and mining could be considered on a case-by-case basis. Some exploration and mining already occurs in conservation areas but not on Schedule 4 land. Subsequently, the Government removed this provision from its mining policy. This decision is consistent with public sentiment on the issue: 48% of our respondents opposed mining on conservation land in Schedule 4, 28% were in favour and 19% were neutral.

However, responses to specific proposals for exploration and mining on conservation land revealed a more balanced set of views (see Table 2). Just over a quarter of respondents were in favour of protecting all conservation land from new exploration and mining and a further 14% were opposed to allowing any exploration for minerals or mining on any Schedule 4 land. By contrast, 37% of those surveyed were in favour of exploration and mining on Schedule 4 land, provided strict criteria were applied to guarantee no adverse effects and complete restoration of the environment, and 14% were willing to allow exploration for minerals on Schedule 4 land but mining only with public support.

Table 2: Attitudes to mining and conservation

View about mining and conservation	Percent
Exploration and mining should be allowed on Schedule 4 land, provided strict criteria are applied to guarantee no adverse effects and complete restoration of the environment	37
Exploration for minerals should be allowed on Schedule 4 land, but mining should not go ahead without public support	14
Neither exploration for minerals nor mining should be allowed on any Schedule 4 land	14
All conservation land should be protected from new exploration and mining operations	26
Don't know/Can't choose	10

Summary

New Zealanders are concerned about the environment and believe it is endangered by a number of threats. However, the environment is not a major issue for many New Zealanders compared to the economy, education, health care or crime. The greatest environmental concern for the country is pollution of our rivers, lakes and beaches, but the environmental problem that affects New Zealanders most directly is domestic waste disposal.

Many New Zealanders make an effort to protect the environment through recycling, and some reduce their energy or fuel use for environmental reasons. But New Zealanders are less involved in other environmental protection activities than they were in 2000, and less willing to pay for protecting the environment through higher prices and taxes. Nevertheless, sizeable minorities would be prepared to pay higher prices or taxes, or accept cuts in their standard of living to achieve this end.

Most New Zealanders are in favour of legislation to protect the environment, even if it means interfering with the rights of individuals and businesses to make their own decisions. However, only a small minority support the Emissions Trading Scheme, though the scheme is not well understood. Generally New Zealanders are opposed to mining on conservation land, but this opposition is tempered somewhat if adverse effects can be mitigated.

While New Zealanders' concerns for the environment are clear, their behaviour and attitudes suggest that the environment is less important to New Zealanders now than in 2000. Though this trend started in the 1990s, it is not clear if it reflects declining concern for the environment among New Zealanders, or a perception that measures introduced since the 1990s (such as the Resource Management Act and the Emissions Trading Scheme) are protecting the environment.

About the Authors

Members of the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing involved in this survey were: Professor Philip Gendall (Professor of Marketing) and Dr Nicola Murray.

Access to data from previous ISSP surveys conducted in New Zealand: Religion, 1991, 1998 and 2008; Social Inequality, 1992, 1999 and 2009; The Environment, 1993 and 2000; The Roles of Men and Women in Society, 1994 and 2002; National Identity, 1996 and 2003; The Role of Government and Work Orientation, 1997; Social Networks, 2001; Citizenship, 2004; Work Orientation, 2005; Role of Government, 2006; Sport and Leisure, 2007; is available through the School of Communication, Journalism & Marketing, Massey University