

# REASONS TO PROTECT NATURE

## A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF AUSTRALIANS' AVOIDANCE/APPROACH MOTIVATIONS AND EMOTIONS

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### SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO AUSTRALIANS BEHAVIOURS TOWARD THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ARE NEEDED TO MITIGATE A CLIMATE EMERGENCY.

Motivations have shown to be strong predictors of behaviour, however, the specific motivations that may drive individuals' protective action for the natural environment are unknown. Emotions facilitate motivation, priming specific behaviours to achieve goals, and have shown to be related to pro-environmental motivations and actions (Carver, 2006; Dickinson et al., 2016; Kates & DeSteno, 2021).

As Australians existing concerns for the natural environment have not translated into meaningful action (Collins et al., 2023, Lowy, 2021), a deeper understanding of the specific emotions and motivations of the Australian community is essential to close the attitude-behaviour gap. Against this backdrop, this study employed a qualitative approach to identify the content of Australian avoidance/approach motivations, and which specific emotions are relevant to protecting the natural environment within the Australian context.

### METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative content analysis approach using secondary data
- Australian subsample consisted of 482 participants aged 18 to 84 years (M = 45.55, SD = 15.76) recruited via an online survey
- Focus on participant answers to the question: 'What do you think is the most important reason to protect nature?' (Gustafson et al., 2022).

### RESULTS

#### Theme 1: Avoidance Motivations

A desire to avoid adverse outcomes of environmental change, stated directly or indirectly, with sub-themes

- (1A) Loss and Destruction
- (1B) Death and suffering

"We should be doing our part to protect nature instead of destroying it"

(Theme 1A)

"We will die without nature"

(Theme 1B)

"To ensure we leave a better and liveable planet"

(Theme 2A)

"Because this planet belongs to *all* life forms"

(Theme 2B)

### WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON TO PROTECT NATURE?

#### Theme 2: Approach Motivations

A desire to move toward potentially rewarding outcomes as a result of protecting the natural environment, with sub-themes:

- (2A) Anthropocentric Approach Motivation
- (2B) Eco-centric Approach Motivation

"The world should be a good place where everyone and everything can live without fear of an early death"

(Theme 3A)

"It's repugnant to think we can wantonly destroy the planet without any regard for the other life forms we destroy in the process"

(Theme 3B)

"We should protect everything. I think it's too late"

(Theme 3C)

"(It's) the kind thing to do, the right thing to do"

(Theme 4A)

"It fuels us physically and spiritually"

(Theme 4B)

"...Everyone should take part in looking after this beautiful planet and all the beautiful life upon it..."

(Theme 4C)

#### Theme 3: Negative Emotions

- Responses where participants directly or indirectly convey a negative emotion, reaction, opinion or stance.
  - (3A) Fear
  - (3B) Contempt
  - (3C) Hopelessness

#### Theme 4: Positive and Self-Transcendent Emotions

- Responses where participants directly or indirectly convey positive or self-transcendent emotions implying admiration of, and appreciation of/for the environment
  - (4A) Compassion and Gratitude
  - (4B) Awe
  - (4C) Beauty and Enjoyment

### CONCLUSIONS

Building on existing research, our findings provided specific instances of both motivations and emotions experienced by Australians in relation to protecting the natural environment. These findings illustrate the diversity of pro-environmental motivations in Australia, suggesting a multi-pronged approach may be beneficial for environmental communications.