

## Environment

# Scottish Environmental Attitudes and Behaviours Survey 2008 (SEABS'08)

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This paper summarises the key findings from the Scottish Environmental Attitudes and Behaviours Survey undertaken in 2008 (SEABS'08). The over-arching aim of the survey was to produce dedicated, sound and up-to-date robust social survey data on environmental attitudes and behaviours, to support the development and delivery of environmental policy. The survey covered a number of topics including: attitudes towards climate change, travel behaviour, energy consumption, recycling, eco-purchasing, wellbeing and use of greenspace. It was conducted among a representative sample of 3,054 adults across Scotland.

## Main Findings

- People were more likely to regard the environment as a global problem rather than as an important issue facing Scotland.
- A majority of people agreed that climate change is an urgent problem and disagreed that climate change will only impact on other countries, so there is no need to worry. On the other hand, just over a third said they do not believe their own behaviour contributes to climate change and just under half said tackling climate change shouldn't come at the expense of the Scottish economy.
- Asked what would do most to reduce climate change, respondents were more likely to mention relatively 'easy' actions, such as recycling and avoiding creating waste, as opposed to actions which demand more of a sacrifice on the part of the public, such as taking fewer foreign holidays.
- There are some signs that people are starting to change their behaviour for the sake of the environment, with a relatively high proportion of people saying that they recycle various types of household waste on a regular basis; reuse household items; and take measures to save energy in the home (such as using energy saving light bulbs).
- The survey found a clear link between attitudes and behaviour: those who were the most environmentally engaged were the most likely to have made green lifestyles changes in terms of recycling, eco-purchasing, reusing household items and taking energy saving measures in the home.
- Still, across all groups of respondents, participation in other forms of green behaviour remains low. Most notably: 44% of those who live a mile from work and own a car drive there; almost two-thirds drive every day; almost half have flown for leisure in the last year; the majority of those who have bought a fridge or freezer in the last year do not know its energy rating; and only 1% use energy from micro-generation.
- The main barriers to green behaviour identified in the survey were: cost, convenience, a lack of alternative options, and practical considerations.
- People were generally in favour of generating more energy from renewable sources but they were unwilling to pay higher household bills, or sacrifice the aesthetic of the landscape to make this possible. Similarly, whereas a majority supported the idea of charging up to 10p for a carrier bag, fewer than half were in favour of congestion charging and charging for water by water meters.
- Positive links between wellbeing and greenspace were evident.

## About the study

The Scottish Environmental Attitudes and Behaviours Survey 2008 (SEABS'08) was undertaken amongst a quota sample of 3,054 adults in Scotland (aged 16+) between 18 August and 15 November 2008. All interviews were conducted face to face in respondents' homes.

The overarching aim of the SEABS'08 was to provide data about environmental attitudes and behaviour which would allow intelligent analyses and policy responses as to whether, and how, government can bring about changes in behaviour, serving the Scottish Government's Greener and Wealthier and Fairer portfolios<sup>1</sup>.

Specific topics covered in the questionnaire were as follows:

- the salience of the environment and specific environment problems;
- knowledge and attitudes towards climate change;
- travel behaviour;
- energy consumption;
- reusing and recycling;
- eco-purchasing; and
- wellbeing and greenspace.

Survey respondents represent only a sample of the total population. All survey results are subject to sampling variability.

It is also important to note that the findings presented throughout this report are based on what people say about their environmental attitudes and behaviour. It may be that some respondents overstated their concern for the environment due to a social desirability effect.

Further details of the survey methodology are available in the full SEABS'08 report.

## The importance of the environment and of specific environmental issues

Respondents were asked what they considered to be the most important issues facing Scotland today. The most common responses related to the economy (mentioned by 38% overall); crime, law and order, anti-social behaviour (32%); and the Scottish constitution (17%). The environment was mentioned by fewer respondents – 12% overall.

Respondents were also asked about the most important issue facing the world today. In this instance, the environment registered at a significantly higher level, with just over a third (35%) of respondents mentioning the issue and 18% identifying it as the single most important issue facing the world. Only one issue, terrorism/the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan received more responses (43%). The economy, like the environment, was mentioned by 35% of respondents.

The survey included a question to gauge which specific environmental issues are most prominent in the public mind. Climate change was by far the most commonly cited issue; 41% of respondents in total mentioned it, with 27% identifying it as the *single most significant* environmental issue. The next highest ranking issues were changing weather patterns (mentioned by 19% overall) and household waste (18%).

## Knowledge of, and attitudes towards, climate change

Levels of awareness of climate change were mixed. Around half of respondents in Scotland claimed to know either a great deal (5%) or a fair amount (43%) about climate change, while two fifths (40%) said they did not know very much and 10% said that they had heard of climate change but knew nothing about it. Only 1% said that they had never heard of climate change.

All respondents who said they knew something about climate change were also asked what they thought were the main effects and main causes of the issue. In terms of effects, the majority mentioned general changes in weather (61%), while 35% mentioned melting ice caps and rises in sea levels. The most common responses in regard to perceived causes of climate change were: emissions, including emissions from cars and road transport (35%); general CO2 emissions (34%); and emissions from factories and power stations (30%).

People who said they knew something about climate change were also asked to identify (from a list of options) actions that would do most to ameliorate the problem. The top response was recycling, mentioned by almost half of respondents (45%), followed by avoiding creating waste in the first place (36%) and using a more fuel efficient car (32%). Actions that require more of a sacrifice or effort, such as taking fewer foreign holidays, were mentioned comparatively infrequently (12%).

<sup>1</sup> More detailed objectives of the study can be found in the full report.

The majority of respondents (57%) said climate change is an immediate and urgent problem. However, a considerable proportion did not: around one in five (22%) said that climate change is more of a problem for the future, 4% said that climate change is not really a problem and 9% said they were not convinced that climate change is happening.

A typology of environment engagement was created to provide a clearer analysis of the types of people who may be more open to messages about behavioural change, and to facilitate understanding of the link between attitudes and behaviours.

The typology segments respondents according to their attitudes towards the environment. It comprises a hierarchy of five groupings:

- **Deep Greens (14%):** These are people who: said that the environment was an important issue in Scotland or the most important issue in the world; believed that climate change is an immediate and urgent problem; and said they know a great deal or a fair amount about climate change. These people are the most engaged with the issues and are therefore likely to be the most proactive in terms of adopting new or alternative behaviours.
- **Light Greens (14%):** People who believe that climate change is an immediate and urgent problem and an important issue globally, but who do not necessarily feel well informed about climate change or think that it is an important issue in Scotland. This group could be referred to as "aspiring greens". They may be interested in adopting new behaviours but tend to be more passive than those who are highly engaged.
- **Shallow Greens (30%):** These are people who said that climate change is an immediate and urgent problem, but not one of the most important issues globally or in Scotland. These people accept that climate change is an issue, but may not be convinced of the need to take more than minimal action at present.
- **Distanced (30%):** This group believe that climate change is more of a problem for the future or hold no views on climate change. It is unlikely that this group will readily accept the need for anything more than minor or relatively easy changes to their lifestyle.
- **Disengaged (14%):** These are people who are not convinced that climate change is happening or, that if it is happening, believe it is not a problem. This group are likely to be the most resistant to messages about changing their behaviour.

## Environmental behaviour

### Energy efficiency in the home

To gauge how conscious people are of their energy consumption, respondents were asked whether they felt they could accurately estimate the amount they spend each month on gas and/or electricity. A majority – 68% of those who use electricity and 66% of those who use gas – felt that they could do so.

Only around 1% of respondents (N=33) in the survey use energy from micro-generation. To assess wider awareness of micro-generated forms of energy, all respondents were asked whether they felt their home was suitable for photo voltaics, solar panels, air and ground source heat pumps and micro wind turbines.

A consistently higher proportion of respondents felt their home was *unsuitable* rather than suitable for each of the technologies. However, significant proportions of respondents were unable to give definitive responses either way which points to low awareness of the technologies.

To assess the level of importance people place on energy efficiency, all respondents who had bought electrical appliances in the last two years were asked whether they knew the energy efficiency rating of that appliance. Most said they did not know the rating, although the figure varied depending on the specific type of appliance bought.

Respondents were presented with a list of day to day energy saving behaviours and asked how important they think it is that people do each. All of the behaviours were regarded as at least fairly important by a strong majority of respondents. Around nine in ten people felt it was important to use energy saving light bulbs (90%); hang washing up rather than using a tumble dryer (91%); and turn off lights in rooms that aren't being used (94%). Further, around eight in ten felt it was important that people avoid over-filling kettles (83%) and around seven in ten felt it was important that they turn off heating before going out (73%); and turn off the tap when brushing their teeth (72%).

Respondents were presented with the same list of behaviours again and asked how often they, personally, do each. The prevalence of the behaviours varied considerably. On the one hand, a majority of respondents said they use energy saving light bulbs and hang up washing to dry at least 'most of the time' (63% and 79% respectively). Similarly, 67% said they rarely or never leave lights on in rooms that aren't being used. However, significantly fewer respondents said they turn off heating before going out or turn off the tap when brushing their teeth – indeed, roughly as many people 'rarely' or 'never' did these things as did them 'always' or 'most of the time'.

## Travel behaviour

Respondents were also asked various questions relating to their travel behaviour.

Findings illustrate the centrality of the car in people's lives. Around two thirds (66%) of households had access to at least one car. The majority (56%) of people in employment, who do not work from home, drove to their usual place of work, while 6% got a lift with someone else. In comparison, 16% walked to work, 12% travel by bus, and 5% travel by train. People's choice of transport was closely related to the distance between their home and work; the further they lived from work, the more likely they were to drive there. Nevertheless, over two fifths (44%) of working respondents with access to car who lived a mile or less from their work drove there.

Overall, 54% of people drove to the place where they do their main food and grocery shopping, and 5% got a lift with someone from their household. In contrast, 21% of people walked and 11% travel by bus.

Like travel to work patterns, likelihood of driving to do the main food and grocery shopping was strongly related to distance – almost four in five (78%) of those who lived eleven miles or more from the place where they do their main shop drove there, compared with 41% of those who lived within a mile from the place where they shop.

Regression analysis suggests that among people with access to a car, once other factors have been controlled for, environmental engagement is not a significant factor in determining whether people drive to work. However, Deep Greens (5%) and Light Greens (4%) were more likely to cycle to work than Shallow Greens (1%), the Distanced (1%) and the Disengaged (0%).

## Air travel

Respondents were asked about any journeys by air that they had made in the last twelve months for non-work and work or business purposes.

Overall, 46% of respondents said that they had made at least one journey by air in the last 12 months for non-work reasons: 19% had made just one journey, 12% had made two journeys, 5% had made three and 10% had made four or more. The most common destination for leisure journeys made by air was Europe, with 33% of respondents having flown to this destination in the last twelve months. As in the case of car travel, more environmentally engaged respondents were no less likely to fly for non-work reasons.

Flying for work reasons was less common than flying for leisure purposes. In total 17% of workers had made at least one journey by air in the last 12 months. The most common destination for work journeys made by air was somewhere in the UK, outside of Scotland.

## Recycling and Reusing

Respondents were asked how often they recycle. Of those who said that kerbside recycling facilities were provided in their area, a high proportion had used these: 86% had at some time used paper recycling facilities; and 76% *always* used these where available. Respondents were less likely to always use kerbside can recycling facilities (63%) or kerbside bottle recycling facilities (60%) where available.

Respondents were also asked how often they use or reuse a number of specific household items<sup>2</sup>. Over eight in ten (84%) said that they reused shopping bags or boxes, with almost half (48%) saying that they did this every time. Meanwhile, 74% said that they re-use plastic food containers, 74% that they reuse wrapping paper or gift bags; and 62% said that they reuse plastic drinks bottles.

## Eco-purchasing

Respondents who said that they make all or most of the decisions about what groceries their household buys were asked a series of questions about their shopping behaviour.

Supermarkets were by far the most popular places to buy groceries, with almost all respondents (97%) saying they visit supermarkets at least once a month, and around half (52%) saying they do most of their grocery shopping in supermarkets. Very few people said they regularly buy groceries from other types of shops – for example, only around one in 10 said they visit farmers' markets (9%) or health food shops (7%) at least once a month.

Awareness of different sustainably produced goods varied considerably. Although the majority of respondents were familiar with Scotch Beef (90%), Fair Trade products (83%) and Scotch Lamb (83%), only around one in five had heard of sustainably produced timber (23%), fish from sustainable sources (20%) and Freedom Food (19%). Further, only 3% had heard of LEAF Marque food.

Respondents were asked which, of the products they had heard of, they make a conscious effort to buy. Two thirds (66%) of those who had heard of Scotch Beef and around half (53%) of those who had heard of Fair Trade products said they made a point of buying these items. The figures for fish from sustainable sources, Freedom Food, timber, and LEAF Marque food, were lower, at 39%, 23%, 20% and 11% respectively.

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<sup>2</sup> Given that it is becoming more socially desirable to reuse items such as shopping bags – and arguably more socially unacceptable not to – it should be borne in mind that there may be a degree of over-reporting of these actions.

Respondents were presented with a list of other eco-friendly products and asked how often, if at all, they buy each. Free range eggs were the most widely bought product, with three in five respondents saying they choose these 'every time' or 'most times'. None of the other products were bought with the same frequency by a majority of respondents. Free range poultry and recycled toilet paper – the next most commonly purchased products – were bought 'every time' or 'most times' by 28% and 22% of respondents respectively.

## Barriers to green behaviour

The survey included a suite of questions aimed at gauging why people do not always choose to adapt their behaviour in ways that may be helpful to the environment.

While some of the reasons cited were very behaviour-specific there were four recurring themes which consistently ranked highly. These were: convenience; cost; a lack of alternative options; and practical considerations.

Convenience was the factor that most commonly underpinned people's choice of behaviour. Indeed, it was the main reason respondents gave for opting to: drive to work (50%); drive to do grocery shopping (54%); and use air travel within the UK for leisure (74%) or business purposes (67%).

Cost considerations were among the main reasons respondents gave for changing their gas and/or electricity supplier (89% and 88% respectively) and for not buying more locally produced food (21%).

A lack of alternative options was most commonly cited in relation to travel behaviour and specifically: driving to work (18% said there was no direct public transport); driving to do grocery shopping (13% said there was no direct public transport); and driving children to school (24% said there were no practical alternatives).

Practical considerations cited were closely related to convenience. For example, among the reasons people gave for driving to work were that public transport takes too long (13%) and that their work is too far to walk or cycle (10%). Similarly, a significant proportion of those who drove to do grocery shopping said they did so because their shopping is too heavy to carry home on foot or onto public transport (44%).

## Meeting the challenge of climate change

### Trust in government information

To assess how receptive the public are likely to be to Government communications about climate change, respondents were asked which sources they trusted the most and the least to give them correct information about climate change.

People were nearly twice as likely to say they would trust independent scientists than any other source of information (45%). The next most trusted sources were environmental groups or charities (25%) and television news programmes (23%). In comparison, one in ten respondents (12%) said they would trust the Scottish Government to give them correct information about climate change.

As regards the sources of information that people said they would trust least, just over a third mentioned the UK Government (34%) and tabloid newspapers (34%), while around a quarter (23%) mentioned business and industry. 17% said they would trust the Scottish Government the least.

### Energy policy options

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements relating to the value and impact of renewable energy sources, as well as nuclear energy and traditional energy sources.

People were considerably more likely to be positive than negative about the value of renewable energy, with around three in five (58%) disagreeing that windfarms do more damage than good to the natural environment (12% agreed). However, over two in five (44%) thought that windfarms and hydro electric schemes should only be built on the condition that they don't lead to more pylons. Further, a majority (53%) said they would not be happy to pay more for electricity produced in an environmentally friendly way.

### Support for possible policies aimed at tackling climate change

Respondents were asked whether they would support or oppose three hypothetical policy options aimed at tackling climate change. These were:

- charging car owners to drive in city centres (i.e. congestion charging);
- introducing water meters so that people only pay for the amount of water they use (rather than being charged a flat rate); and
- requiring shops to charge up to 10p for a carrier bag.

Of the three policies, people were most in favour of charging for carrier bags (61%). However, a significant minority – 37% – said they would oppose this action. Opinion was more divided in respect to introducing water meters (49% supported and 45% opposed) and charging car owners to drive in city centres (40% supported and 55% opposed).

Among people with a car available in their household the majority (59%) opposed congestion charging, with only 37% supporting this policy option.

## Wellbeing and greenspace

Recent research has indicated that use of greenspace helps to promote both physical and psychological wellbeing.

When asked how often they visited greenspaces, 55% of respondents said they did so at least once a week, 22% said at least once a month but less than once a week, 13% said less than once a month, and 10% said they never visited greenspaces.

Links between use of greenspace and wellbeing were apparent: those who said they visited greenspace everyday, at least once a week or at least sometimes, were more likely than those who never did so to say they were satisfied with life (82%, 77%, and 78% respectively versus 68%). Conversely, those who never visited greenspace were nearly twice as likely as those who did so every day to say they were dissatisfied with life (27% versus 14%).

However, when asked which two or three things would do most improve their wellbeing, respondents were more likely to mention having more money (27%), being healthier (23%), and spending more time with family (20%), than spending more time outdoors (11%).

## Conclusions

In some respects, the findings provide grounds for optimism. Even though the fieldwork took place during a period when much media output was focused on the economy and the 'credit crunch', a considerable proportion of people mentioned the environment as an important issue globally and recognised that climate change is a problem that requires immediate action.

Further, there are some signs that people are starting to change their behaviour and are taking action for the sake of the environment. Recycling, in particular appears to be commonplace.

Notwithstanding these positive findings, the survey also highlights significant challenges. Only a small proportion of people mentioned the environment as an important issue in Scotland and levels of participation in many forms of environmental behaviour remain low.

One of the key difficulties of promoting green behaviours is that the benefits are not necessarily obvious or immediate. Environmental considerations have to be weighed against competing demands, with cost and convenience often the most prominent considerations influencing people's choice of behaviours.

As actions that require the least effort, cost, or thought tend to be the most common, it might be expected that actions that require a greater trade-off would only be undertaken by the most environmentally engaged. However, even among those whose recognition of the problem and the need for change is greatest, change in behaviour is limited: they may want to avert climate change and play their part, but at the same time they still want to fly for leisure purposes and drive to work.

While challenges ahead are undeniable, the survey results also provide an indication of ways in which environmental behaviour could be encouraged in the future. The two greatest barriers to change, effort and cost, may provide opportunities to shape the architecture of people's choices and therefore their behaviour. Not only may there be scope to make some environmentally friendly behaviours easier to adopt, there may also be areas where non-environmentally friendly options can be made more difficult. Similarly, and where appropriate, highlighting potential cost-savings to be made from green behaviours (such as using less energy) may provide an effective means by which to 'sell' pro-environmental behaviours to the public.

This document, along with "Scottish Environmental Attitudes and Behaviours Survey 2008" the full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, or would like further copies of this research findings summary document or the full research report, please contact us at [socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or on 0131-244 7560.



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