

Climate Change: UK citizens want the Government to do more

The survey covered 3,403 UK citizens aged 18+, with the objective of understanding more about the appetite for government action on climate change. Significant results include:

55% of the UK public agree with 7 or more, out of 16, bold government-imposed changes to their lives in tackling climate change

37% say they will only vote for a party that they believe is genuinely committed to reducing climate change

38% of people would support price increases for the sake of the planet

Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups have a greater level of participation in climate change activities and a stronger belief in government action

Young people aged 18-24 rank climate change as a much more important issue than older people

The Commitment is a declaration made by UK citizens that they will put the climate and the natural world at the heart of their decision when they vote. In addition, citizens make a personal statement explaining why they have made The Commitment. These declarations and personal statements will be aggregated and taken to local politicians (MPs and councillors) to show the depth of support for more urgent action on the climate and the natural world. This will give politicians a stronger mandate and the encouragement to accelerate government action on climate change and biodiversity loss.

The Commitment was established in October 2018 and is in development. We have conducted extensive research of which one part has been the quantitative survey covered in this report. We have recently conducted qualitative research and are now working on branding and promotion. In January 2020 we will begin to test the model on the ground in parliamentary constituencies, with full operation planned to begin in April 2020.

This is the first report to be published by The Commitment. We will produce further reports to share the findings from our research and from our work generally. This report is made available under a Creative Commons licence.

The Commitment is a project of Caplor Horizons, a UK charity which works with other charities to improve their effectiveness and ensure their sustainable future (www.caplorhorizons.org).

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Executive Summary

In June 2019, The Commitment surveyed 3,403 UK citizens aged 18+. The objective of the research was to assess people's appetite for government action on climate change.

The study found that there is an appetite from a significant number of UK citizens for bold government action, even if it means that prices of products and services increase as a result. In addition, over one third of citizens surveyed would only vote for a party that they believed was genuinely committed to reducing climate change. These people are more likely to be voters that are younger, female, well educated, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) and city dwellers.

Three key findings came out of this study and form the focus of this report:

- ✘ 55% of respondents would welcome or accept at least 7 out of 16 bold government-imposed changes to their lives to tackle climate change. They particularly want the Government to invest in renewable energy and environmentally friendly transport. Overall, respondents would prefer the costs of measures to address climate change to be borne indirectly through government spending and the taxation of businesses rather than directly.
- ✘ Our primary objective was to assess how much UK citizens are willing to have their lives changed by government action to address climate change. Overall, 38% of people would support price increases of products and services for the sake of the planet. Amongst particular groups, 33% of those earning under £20,000 a year and 33% of those just about making ends meet or struggling financially supported these price increases.
- ✘ BAME respondents have taken more action to reduce climate change than white British respondents and have a stronger belief in the principle of government action.

Context

Over the last two years, the UK has seen a substantial surge in public awareness and concern about climate change. Polls carried out by MORI, Opinium and BEIS suggest that this has reached a record high with 80% of the British public 'fairly' or 'very' concerned (Barasi, 2019). A recent poll commissioned by Greenpeace found that two-thirds of people in the UK now recognise that there is a climate emergency (Opinium, 2019; Taylor, 2019; Carrington, 2019).

Public attitudes are hardening. UK polls show that 64% of people say that the Government should be responsible for acting on climate change and 48% believe it would be acceptable for UK citizens to take the Government to court if it failed to keep Paris Agreement pledges (Opinium, 2019; Taylor, 2019; edie newsroom, 2018). In addition, 76% say that they would cast their vote differently to protect the planet (Opinium, 2019.)

The increased incidence of extreme weather patterns around the world is beginning to make the impacts of climate change more visible. For example, in July 2019 records for the hottest month were broken across much of Europe and tropical cyclone Idai was one of the worst cyclones on record to affect Africa and the Southern Hemisphere (World Meteorological Organization, 2019; Yuhas, 2019).

In May 2019, the UK Parliament declared a Climate Emergency, adding to the 261 councils which have done the same to date (BBC News, 2019; Declare a Climate Emergency, 2019).

Rising public concern about climate change has not been matched by political action. A study conducted by Green Alliance and Lancaster University found that politicians understand the need for action on climate change, but that it is not straightforward for them to act (Willis, 2018). This is mainly because 1) MPs perceive limited interest from their constituents on climate change; 2) climate change is seen as an 'outsider' issue (i.e. not something discussed as part of the political mainstream) making many MPs reluctant to champion it; and 3) the long term challenges that come with climate change do not fit well with the daily practice of politics (Willis, 2018).

This survey

Within this context, the primary objective of this survey was to assess the extent to which UK citizens are willing to have their lives changed by government action to address climate change. Secondary objectives were to find out how much citizens had done in their own lives to reduce climate change and to what extent voting intentions were driven by it. All of these questions were investigated across variables of age, gender, ethnicity, education, financial situation, voting intention, and where they live.

The survey and the analysis of results were carried out in the second and third quarters of 2019. The research was carried out by Julian Bond, a quantitative research expert and former CEO of Research International. The survey participants were provided by Watermelon Research Limited.

The research is based on a quantitative survey of 3,403 UK citizens aged 18 and over. They were asked about the actions they had taken to reduce climate change; their views on government action in relation to climate change; some general questions about their opinions on climate change; and their feelings about biodiversity loss.

A Maximum Difference Scaling (MaxDiff) research technique was used for measuring the relative importance of different issues to respondents. This is a trade-off analysis technique that asks respondents to look at different issues and say which they find most important and which they find least important. Because they compare each of the issues against each other, it is possible to determine across all issues which ones matter most and which ones matter least. This tool eliminates scaling bias, allows for diversity and gives a stronger discrimination power (Mora, 2019).

Mid-way through the quantitative research the BAME group was boosted. Because the BAME population of the UK is just over 10%, the base size of this group in the national sample was 300 people. This was not considered robust enough to perform reliable analysis, so the decision was taken to recruit an additional boost sample of 400 BAME participants.

If you would like to see the raw data, please email charlotte.h@thecommitment.uk

Calls for bold government action

55% of citizens agreed with 7 or more of 16 changes that the government might introduce to tackle climate change

Out of 16 proposed government actions to reduce climate change, 93% of people agreed with at least one policy that they believed the Government should act on. 85% agreed with at least three, 55% agreed with seven or more, and more than one third of respondents agreed with at least nine.

Although support for specific policies varies widely (Table 1) in general respondents would prefer the cost to be borne indirectly through government investment and the taxation of businesses, rather than directly through increased costs of consumption.

Nevertheless, there is significant support for actions that will cost the consumer, partly from taxing retailers and imports, but also from products such as plastic containers. 50% of people surveyed said that there should be a tax on plastic containers even if it increased prices.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with different government actions

Government Action	Agree/Strongly Agree
Invest in renewable energy so prices do not increase	77%
Increase subsidies to public transport to lower fares/increase usage	70%
Subsidise electric charging points for cars	61%
Tax retailers based on how much plastic they use	60%
Tax imports from countries that do not meet globally agreed emission targets	57%
Tax on plastic containers – even if it increases prices	50%
Introduce a business tax for energy consumption that penalizes heavy users	49%
All new cars sold after 2025 should be electric or electric/petrol hybrids	48%
Households should be fined for not recycling plastic/glass etc.	46%
Tax on all flights with the money used to offset carbon emissions	38%
All new cars sold after 2025 should be totally electric	34%
No increase in numbers of flights into or out of UK airports	32%
Insist all suppliers provide carbon neutral energy but allow prices to increase	28%
Petrol tax should be increased to offset carbon emissions	27%
Introduce a tax on meat to reduce climate change from farming	25%
Ban the sale of gas cookers	17%

37% say they will only vote for a party that they believe is genuinely committed to reducing climate change

77% of respondents would support government investment in renewable energy so prices do not increase. There is also a strong appetite for bolder action on environmentally friendly transport. When asked if “the Government should increase subsidies to public transport to lower fares and encourage increased usage” overwhelmingly 70% were in favour with 8% against. Similarly, 61% were in favour of subsidising charging points for electric cars with 11% against. 48% of people believe that all new cars sold after 2025 should be electric or hybrid with 21% against. This is contrary to the Government’s current target of 2040 (Parliament, 2018) again suggesting that people want bolder action.

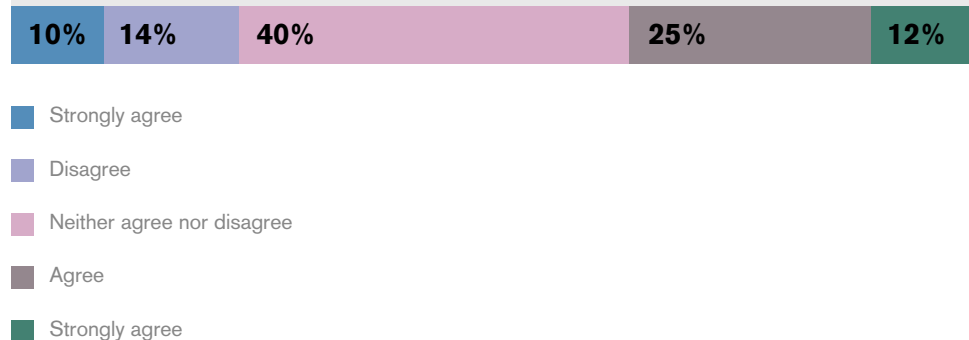
However, while there was an appetite for bolder action, there was scepticism about whether governments would deliver it. When asked if they believe that “governments have no genuine interest in reducing climate change” 43% agreed with only 19% disagreeing. Furthermore, 57% of those surveyed believe it is the people who will save the planet, not governments.

37% say they will only vote for a party that they believe is genuinely committed to reducing climate change

Climate change is rising on the voting agenda. Chart 1 shows that 25% of people agree and 12% strongly agree with the statement “I will only vote for a party that I believe is genuinely committed to reducing climate change”.

Chart 1: Views on voting for a party that participants believe are genuinely committed to reducing climate change

Q: I will only vote for a party that I believe is genuinely committed to reducing climate change. (n = 3,403)



Groups that showed the most support for putting climate change at the heart of their voting intentions included voters who are younger, well educated, BAME and city dwellers. Women also showed more support than men with 39% of female respondents saying they will only vote for a party that they believe is genuinely committed to reducing climate change compared with 34% of men.

Interestingly, 40% of people were unsure as to whether they would only vote for a party that they believed was genuinely committed to reducing climate change, leaving them open to taking a stronger position.

Individual appetite for change

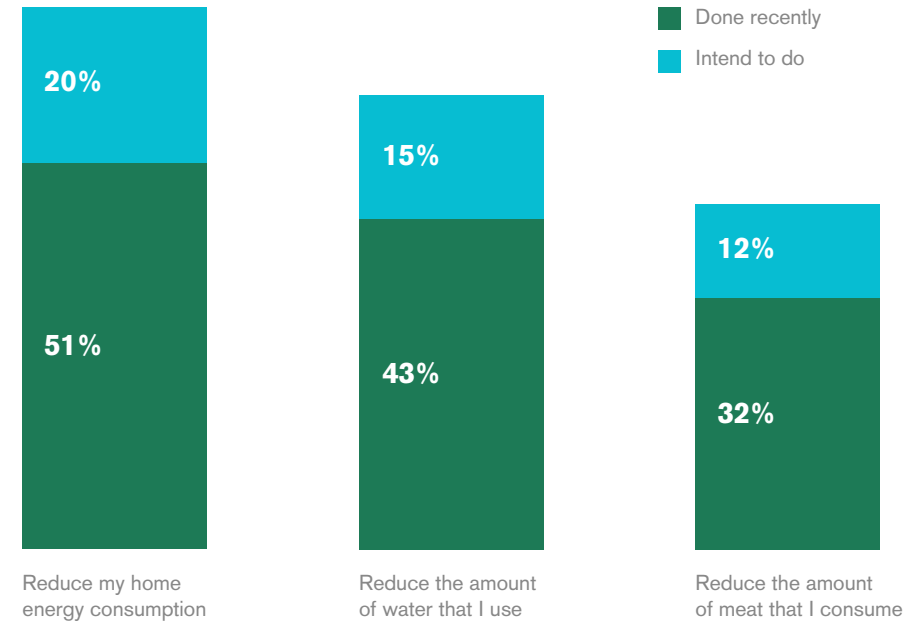
Citizens are taking action themselves, independent of government action

When asked what they are already doing to fight climate change, respondents showed that they are already taking action, or are planning to do so, in many areas such as reducing energy and water usage. The three categories with the highest percentages can be seen in Chart 2.

As well as taking action themselves, there was strong support for penalising those who did not comply with environmental measures: 46% agreed that households should be fined for not recycling while only 28% of people opposed.

Chart 2: Percentage of people who are either planning to reduce, or already reducing, their consumption

Q: Which have you done in the last few years? Which do you intend to do over the next year or so? Please select all that apply. (n = 3,403)



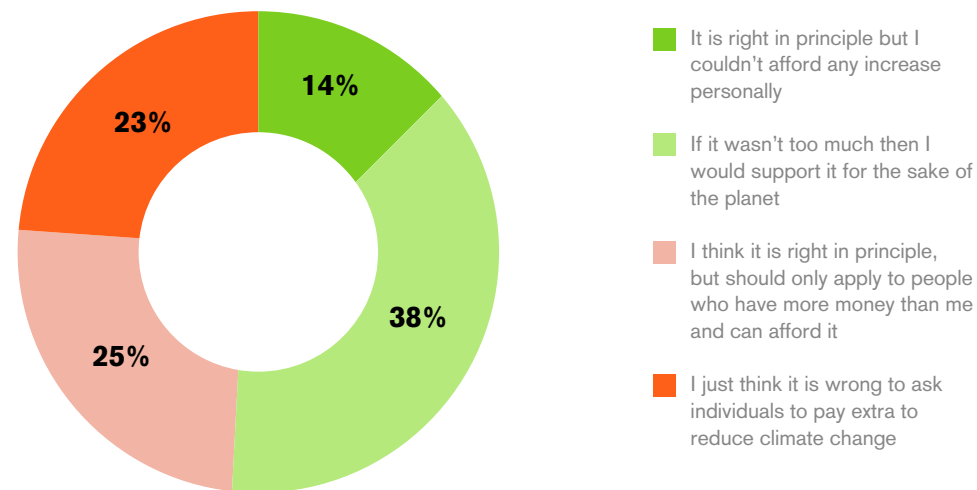
38% of people would support price increases for the sake of the planet.

38% of people would support price increases for the sake of the planet. Many of these people are struggling financially or just about making ends meet.

If the UK is to reduce its carbon emissions it is highly likely that the price of some products and services will increase. Respondents were asked if this is right in principle and whether they would be willing to pay for the sake of the planet. Over three quarters of those surveyed believe it is right in principle to pay more for some products and services to fight climate change.

Chart 3: Views on price increases for the sake of the planet

Q: To ensure the UK reduces its carbon emissions it is possible that the price of some products and services could increase. Which of these statements best describes your view on this? (BAME = 406)



33% of those earning less than £20,000 a year would accept price increases for the sake of the planet.

33% of those struggling financially or just about making ends meet supported price increases for the sake of the planet, more than those that are in a good financial situation (29%).

Analysing people by income, those on low incomes also show an appetite for paying to tackle climate change. If it wasn't too much, 33% of those earning less than £20,000 a year would accept price increases for the sake of the planet.

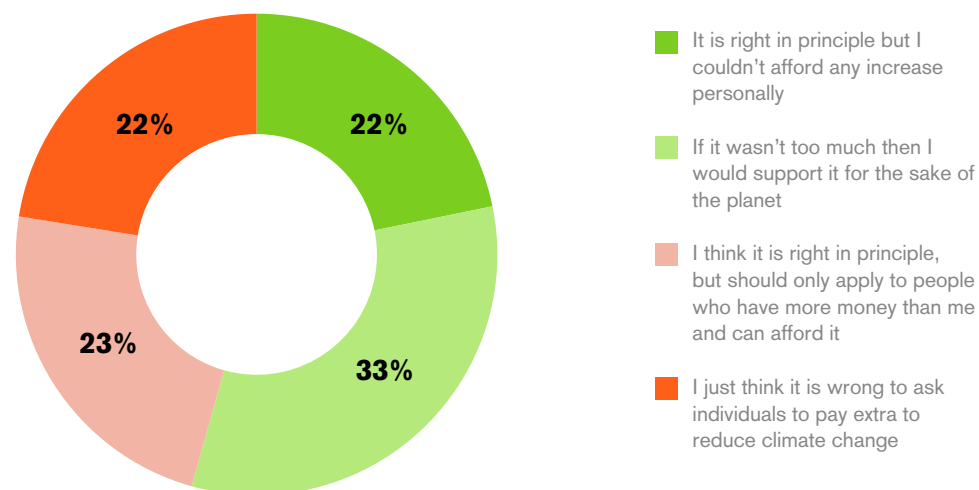
Table 2: Breakdown of those that would support price increases for the sake of the planet by financial situation

Q: Which of these statements best describes your situation? (n = 1,293)

I really struggle financially, and sometimes fail to make ends meet	5%
Just about making ends meet	29%
My financial situation is OK, although I don't have a lot spare at the end of the month	36%
My financial situation is good, and I have a reasonable choice over what I spend money on	29%
Total sample	38%

Chart 4: Breakdown of those earning less than £20,000 a year who would support price increases for the sake of the planet

Q: To ensure the UK reduces its carbon emissions it is possible that the price of some products and services could increase. Which of these statements best describes your view on this? (< £20,000 per year = 1,181)



Current public concern

BAME respondents have taken more action to reduce climate change than white British respondents. They also have a stronger belief in government action, although those that are in a good financial situation are less willing to pay for it.

BAME groups make up around 14% of the UK's population, with 40% living in London (ONS, 2018). However, this section of society is often absent or invisible in the environmental movement (Yusuf, 2019b; Josette, 2019).

BAME and white British groups cover 92% of our sample (12% and 80% respectively). Our data, summarised in Table 3, show that BAME citizens have taken, and intend to take, more action than white British citizens in reducing climate change. BAME citizens rank higher in six out of eight indicators of action taken to reduce climate change in the last few years and scored higher in every single question about future intended actions. For example, BAME respondents have a greater level of participation in reducing the amount they fly for leisure, speaking to their MP, posting on social media, taking part in marches or gatherings, purchasing an electric or hybrid car and reducing their meat consumption.

Table 3: Past and intended actions to reduce climate change by ethnicity

Q: Which have you done in the last few years? Which do you intend to do over the next year or so? Please select all that apply. (white British=2,709; BAME = 406)

	Done (last few years)		Intended (next year or so)	
	White British	BAME	White British	BAME
Reduced energy consumption	52%	47%	19%	20%
Reduced water consumption	44%	39%	14%	20%
Reduced flying for leisure	14%	17%	8%	13%
Reduced meat consumption	31%	36%	11%	17%
Spoke to MP about climate change	5%	8%	4%	11%
Partaken in a climate change march/gathering	3%	11%	6%	11%
Posted about climate change on social media	12%	16%	5%	14%
Purchased an electric/hybrid car	4%	10%	11%	21%

Current public concern

Other questions that were asked relating to climate change (Table 4) also showed a greater level of BAME commitment:

Table 4: Percentage of respondents that agree or strongly agree with these statements by ethnicity

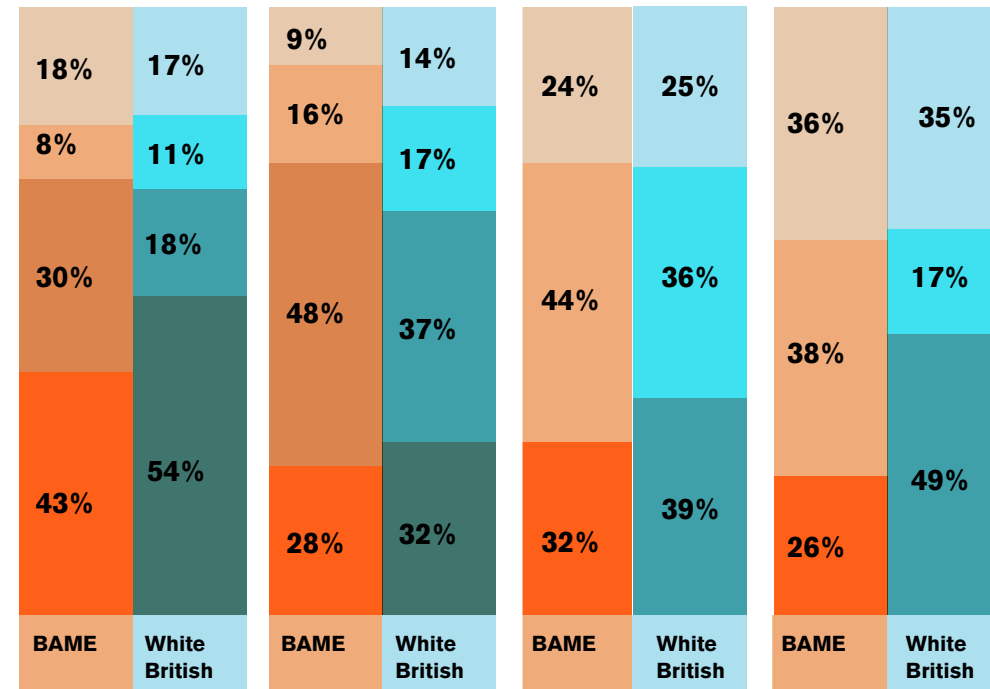
Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree.
(white British=2,709; BAME = 406)

	White British	BAME
"I will only vote for a party that I believe is genuinely committed to reducing climate change"	35%	44%
"I am passionately concerned about the impact of climate change on biodiversity"	43%	51%
"Governments have no genuine interest in reducing climate change"	42%	51%
"If it wasn't too much, then I would support it for the sake of the planet"	39%	36%

BAME citizens who are struggling financially are more willing to pay to reduce climate change than those who are doing well financially.

Chart 5 shows that BAME citizens who are struggling financially are more willing to pay to reduce climate change than those who are doing well financially. This is more polarised than white British groups. For example, 30% of BAME citizen who are struggling financially and 48% who are just about managing to make ends meet, say that if it wasn't too much they would support it for the sake of the planet. These figures are both higher than white British responses; 18% and 37% respectively. On the other hand, 44% of BAME people whose financial situation is OK (although they don't have a lot spare at the end of the month), and 38% of BAME respondents that say their financial situation is good, said that price changes of products and services should only apply to people who have more money than them. This compares to the white British groups which are 36% and 17% respectively.

Chart 5: Willingness to pay to reduce climate change by financial situation and ethnicity
 Q: To ensure the UK reduces its carbon emissions it is possible that the price of some products and services could increase. Which of these statements best describes your view on this? (BAME = 406; white British=2,709)



I really struggle financially, and sometimes fail to make ends meet

I am just about managing to make ends meet

My financial situation is OK, although I don't have a lot spare at the end of the month

My financial situation is good, and I have a reasonable choice over what I spend money on

- I just think it is wrong to ask individuals to pay extra to reduce climate change
- I think it is right in principle, but should only apply to people who have more money than me and can afford it
- If it wasn't too much then I would support it for the sake of the planet
- It is right in principle but I couldn't afford any increase personally

Young people aged 18-24 rank climate change as a much more important issue than older people.

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The survey highlighted that young people aged 18-24 ranked climate change as second out of eight issues, topped only by the NHS, compared with older groups' rankings of sixth to eighth (see Table 5).

Those that are the most concerned about climate change are also those that are most likely to post on social media or to go on marches. Our results found 29% of younger people are posting about climate change on social media compared with the average of 12%, and they are twice as likely as the average person to attend a climate change march (18-24 = 10%, average = 5%).

Table 5: Ranking of climate change in order of importance by age group

Respondents were given sets of four issues. For each set they are asked to say which issue they consider to be most important and which issue they consider to be least important. Issues given were Brexit, NHS, the economy, climate change, the elderly, policing, low earners, and education. (n= 3,403)

Age Group	Ranking (Out of 8)
<25	2nd
25-34	6th
35-44	7th
45-54	7th
54-64	8th
65+	7th

There is a high level of resignation around the issue of biodiversity loss with a principal feeling of sadness, followed by frustration and helplessness

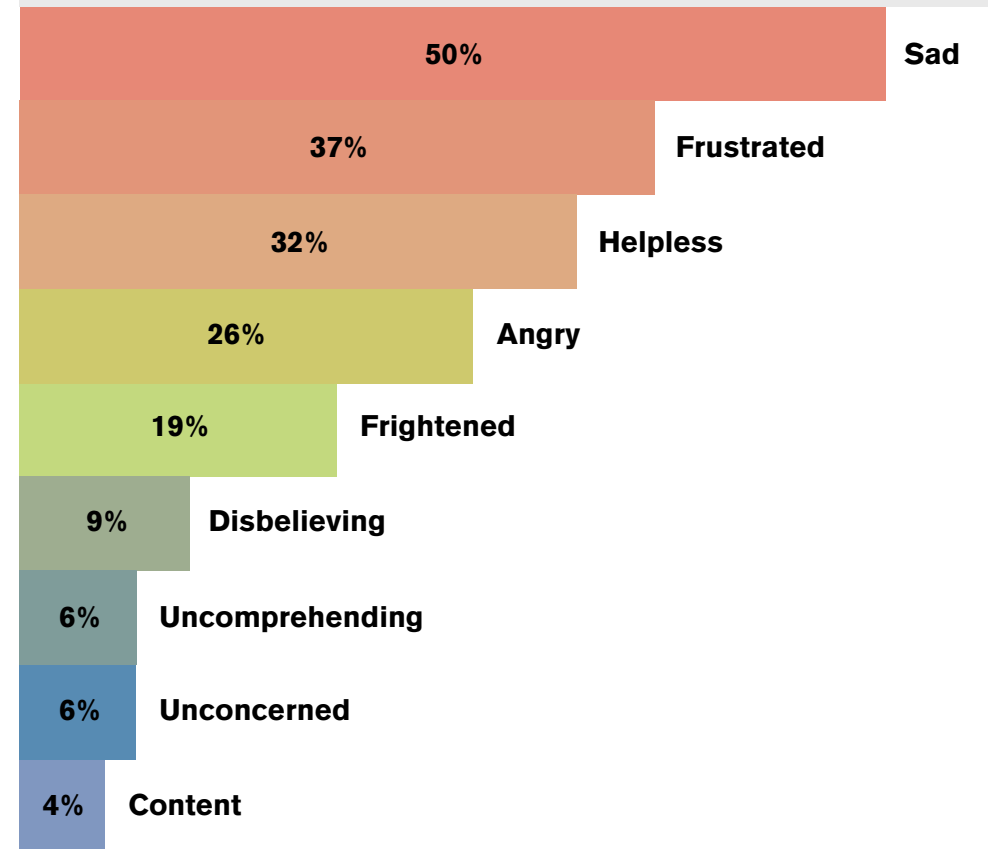
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Climate change, alongside factors like land degradation, pollution and habitat loss, is becoming a major threat to biodiversity (Harvey, 2018). Although loss of biodiversity may not seem an obvious cause of climate change, it is now widely recognised that climate change and biodiversity both affect the other (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2019).

According to the survey, 44% of people are “passionately concerned about the impact of climate change on biodiversity”, compared with 17% who disagreed with this statement, and 40% who neither agreed nor disagreed. Of those aged 18-34, 50% were concerned about biodiversity loss, compared with 34% of those aged 65+, and the average of 44%.

Chart 6: Emotional responses to biodiversity loss

Q: When you see or read about biodiversity loss around the world, which of the following words describes how you feel? Please select all that apply. (n= 3,403)



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