



the drum 

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mcr

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MCR is Queensland's top social research agency, having conducted work for both government and corporate clients for over 15 years. We regularly conduct polling and focus groups to tap into the very latest opinions on the public and community impact of a range of social issues. These include public health matters, the environment, transport, road safety, financial changes and government regulations.

Welcome to our April edition.

Welcome to the April edition of The Drum. The Drum is a monthly publication which reports back on the views of MCR's special "public interest" focus group.

The group consists of 8 Brisbane residents who come from all walks of life and a range of Brisbane suburbs. They are aged from their early 20s to their 60s.

Each month we get the group together and ask them to discuss a number of "hot" news issues.

The Beattie Barometer

It's all been 'business as usual' with the Beattie Government over the last month, say our respondents. Things have more or less settled down for a while.

In fact, our group were amused by their discovery that, between the 8 of them, they couldn't think of one 'bad news' headline they had seen recently. A far cry from previous months.

Of course, a cynic might say this has something to do with Beattie being overseas recently. And a psychic might

say it bodes well for the stewardship of Anna Bligh. Luckily there are no cynics or psychics at MCR!

But a different story for Howard....

On the other hand, our group think things are just starting to hot up on the Federal scene.

In their minds everything revolves around Howard and Rudd at the moment. And the topics that we discussed this month seem to clearly confirm that.

So read on.....

Climate Change – Does it matter?

It matters a lot according to our group. Not only for themselves, but for their sons and daughters.

We get the feeling that this sleeping giant of an issue is definitely waking with this group.

And they are educating themselves about it. Quite a few had been to see Al Gore's film and it had made a big impression on them.

Just like the 80s, the environment is definitely on the political agenda again!

What should Australia be doing about climate change?

Not an easy question to answer, say our respondents. There's absolutely no doubt that they feel uneasy that we haven't signed Kyoto. There is a sense of 'Shame, Australia. Shame.'

But they are also acutely aware of the importance of the coal industry to Australia's prosperity.

This was a bit of a surprise to us. It makes you wonder whether they are especially tuned into coal because they are Queenslanders. Would you get the same response in Melbourne, we wonder?

Something for Queensland politicians to ponder as they shape their green credentials.

And what about Howard's response to climate change?

For many in our group, Howard is spot on in his approach. He's weighing up the coal trade story against the emissions story and that balance is important.

Sure, some of them would like Howard to take a more sexy position on the environment and appear a bit more green. But the truth is, most feel very comfortable with him being more 'tortoise than hare' on this issue.

In fact, Howard's "I won't be rushed and a true leader has to think things through" strategy is proving popular on a lot of issues with this group.

Terrorism – How safe do we feel?

Will it ever happen in Australia?

Yes, definitely. And the big tipping point for our respondents was Bali. Since then, the idea of an attack on Australia has been a clear case of 'when' not 'if'.

But our group breathe a little easier knowing they don't live down south. They see Sydney and Melbourne as prime targets for an attack.

"They're more likely to go for something iconic. The Sydney Harbour Bridge. The Opera House. That's the way it works."

Reporting doesn't come naturally...

Not surprisingly, our group reports being more alert than they have ever been before. But alertness has also created a dilemma for them – 'to do or not to do'.

Why this dilemma about reporting?

Well for one thing you could end up looking 'like a goose' if you over-react. And there is also some sense that dobbing doesn't come naturally to Australians.

But our group is also horrified about where complacency might lead. All up, they would rather have egg on their faces than blood on the streets.

The State of Our Kids' Education

It doesn't pass the grade according to our respondents.

They have grave concerns about the basics. Their perception is that literacy and numeracy are taking a backseat to other trendier subjects.

As one participant summed it up, "Teachers can teach anything these days, no matter how whacked it is." We could see lots of heads nodding in agreement with that one!

A national approach – Is 'all in together' better?

The general consensus is that a national "back to basics" curriculum is the best way to go.

They think it just makes plain commonsense to introduce Australian education standards through one national body. It's one thing to see a State of Origin battle on the football field. They don't want the same thing happening when it comes to educating kids.

And what can be done about our teachers?

The jury's out on whether the Federal Government's merit-based pay option is the way to go.

Incentives for teachers certainly get a big tick from our respondents.

But some are worried that a teacher's performance will be judged on the achievements of their students. They see this as having real potential to drive a wedge between rich and poor schools.

All up, the Federal Government seems to have a big job ahead of it if it wants to sell performance pay to the electorate.

In coming issues.....

- The Beattie Barometer continued
- What are the electorate's hot buttons for the Federal election – Is it still the economy, stupid?
- Carbon emissions trading
- How big is the obesity problem?
- Will the property market bear the brunt of the superannuation changes?

Any other suggestions? Please let us know.