



**the drum**  
mcr  
Market & Communications  
Research

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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 May edition.

*Welcome to the May 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.*

## Obesity – It's not just knowing what you eat. It's about understanding what you eat.

Our group became particularly animated when this topic was thrown into the ring.

They have no doubts that it is a problem....and a growing one at that.

Many have been touched personally by the issue. Some have been warned by

their own doctors that their weight is a problem. Others talk about either a friend or family having been affected by an illness that can be traced back to obesity as the root problem.

And just about all of them talk about simply noticing people getting fatter.

### ***So what do they blame?***

It's mostly about the food, according to our group. Mainly eating the wrong types of food, especially fast food, and too much of it.

Some mention lack of exercise and busy lifestyles, but these are nowhere near as top of mind as the food issue.

### ***And do they understand the issue?***

Well, yes and no. All of our group rate their knowledge about what causes weight gain as fairly high.

But they also talk about being confused about the different types of diets available. As one put it, "No carb, all carb, low carb. There are so many conflicting ideas."

And some of the new terminology has them bamboozled. Only about half thought they had a handle on what “low GI” or “transfatty acids” means.

### **How is it affecting the choices they are making for their kids at home?**

This lack of knowledge also shows up when they talk about how they are feeding their kids.

On the surface, they talk about having become more careful over the last year or so about what they will give their kids when it comes to treats.

But when we drill down, their knowledge about “healthy” treats is actually a bit fuzzy. So they will report giving out natural confectionary rather than the sugar-loaded variety and muesli bars rather than chocolate. The words “natural” and “muesli” convince them that they are doing the right thing.

In other words, it’s the *perception* of health, rather than the *actuality* of health.

### **And where do these misperceptions come from?**

Our belief is that it’s at least partly about truth in advertising.

Is it any wonder parents think they are doing the right thing when they hear that breakfast bars are nutritious because they have only 8% of fat in them? Or that a product is “fat free”, without being told about the sugar loading?

If our society is to overcome the obesity epidemic, food manufacturers will need to be held more accountable for the way they put their information across. Otherwise parents will remain blissfully ignorant about “doing the right thing”.

### **And what about the choices parents are making for their kids when they eat out?**

Again, parents profess to being pretty choosy about what food outlets they let their kids eat at. And again, they say this has been changing over the last year or so. Whereas once the natural choice would have been Macca’s, now they think a little more about where they go and what choice they make.

In fact, parents have a clear expectation that food outlets will start to offer more options for healthy choices. They lament the fact that the kid’s menu is often not as healthy as the adult fare.

### **But it’s a clear case of “Only if the price is right”**

While parents are demanding healthier choices, they are also price conscious. At this stage, they are not prepared to pay a premium for a healthy option for their kids.

So there’s definitely a market to capture...but it needs to be done at the right price.

## **What are the hot electoral issues on the Federal front?**

Industrial relations, industrial relations, industrial relations, say our group.

Almost all of our respondents pick this as their top priority when it comes to identifying what issues are likely to determine the outcome of the upcoming Federal election.

We were a bit surprised. Maybe it isn’t just about the economy stupid, after all.

### ***But why industrial relations?***

Because they are worried about job security and conditions both for themselves and for their children.

Do they understand a lot about AWAs? Not really. Do they have a clear picture about what Rudd has to offer as an alternative? No again.

But they do have a strong desire for continuity of employment and quality of conditions. And they know the general scuttlebutt is that Howard's Way might jeopardise this in some form.

Mind you, these views were expressed before Howard announced his Fairness Test for WorkChoices. It could be that these changes go some way to reassuring our respondents.

But at the moment, as far as we can see, this issue is all about what their emotions are telling them. It's not so much about the nitty gritty facts.

### ***And are there any other issues on their mind for the election?***

The economy is up there. As is national security, the environment and even the war in Iraq. But nothing is as prominent at the moment as industrial relations.

## **Rudd vs Howard – How does it look post the ALP Conference?**

The ALP conference has made some of our respondents feel a little differently about Rudd.

A number were uncomfortable with Rudd making Howard the butt of his jokes about the 1950s. They just don't think this was warranted.

"I don't like character attacks", say about half of the group.

### ***And does it help that "Kevin's from Queensland"?***

Our group is in no doubt that the election will be all about Queensland marginal seats....and they've spoken about this for some time.

So, not surprisingly, they see right through any reference to Queensland. Sure they think it helps that Rudd's from Queensland. But the Queensland connection won't mean much until they see what special "Queensland" benefits will be coming their way.

## **Corporate Responsibility – Is it on the radar?**

Definitely, say our respondents. And a good thing too, according to them.

They want to know that they are dealing with organisations that care not only for their clients, but for the community and the planet.

But corporates beware! Platitudes won't cut it.

These respondents don't want to just hear about it. They want to see the beginning of some tangible outcomes as well.

For example, a number of respondents talked about the latest series of TV and press ads from Westpac which focus on their corporate responsibility ventures (including information on the environmental Equator Principles).

While our respondents think this is a move in the right direction on Westpac's part, they are also a little cynical. As one respondent put it, "That new Westpac campaign sounds fantastic. But they also need to actually show how they are being responsible."

For these respondents, effective corporate responsibility is not just about saying "where we want to go". It's also about giving an account of "where we are".

## The Beattie Barometer

Another quiet month for Beattie, according to our group. But not necessarily a stand out month. Only two of our respondents were willing to give him more than 5 out of 10 for his efforts this month.

And what do they think of him leaving Anna Bligh with the water crisis while he undertook a trade mission?

Some see it as a deliberate ploy on Beattie's part because he sees the issue as all too hard. And naturally, this doesn't instil a lot of confidence in those respondents.

Nevertheless, the group is comfortable with Bligh being responsible for the issue. They don't think it has to be taken out of her hands....yet.

"But it would be nice to know that Beattie is there supporting her on the issues", say our respondents.

So it looks like more of an upfront involvement from Beattie on this issue wouldn't hurt.

## Feedback from the April issue...

Our discussion on the education debate raised some comments from our clients associated with education.

You will recall that our respondents had significant worries that basic skills were slipping. We received feedback that, on the contrary, literacy and numeracy are currently being given a heavy emphasis in our state schools.

Sounds like the government has to do more of a sales job on its education program to try and knock back the myths that are circulating.

### In coming issues.....

- Have recent changes to superannuation allowing more choice in how people plan their retirement made an impact?
- The Beattie Barometer
- Our continuing analysis of the Rudd factor
- Are we keeping pace with technology?
- The power of unions – Is it really an issue of concern in the upcoming election?
- Coming Home – Views about David Hicks

Any other suggestions? Please send any topics to Annette Ruschena at [aruschena@mcrpl.com.au](mailto:aruschena@mcrpl.com.au)