

Six science questions that could be asked of our local parliamentary representative

The following questions could be a stimulus for some of us to continue our approach to our federal (and state) representatives. They have been adapted from questions compiled by four prominent US scientists in preparation for the presidential debates to be held over the next two months. The original article is at: <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2020/09/five-science-questions-that-ought-to-be-asked-at-the-debate/>

These are not 'gotcha' questions that are likely to receive only defensive answers. They are questions that might help us become clearer about what our federal (or state) political representatives support or don't support.

How could we use these questions?

Here is a suggestion: that we take a question that addresses something we really want to focus on, put it in a polite letter to our local federal (or state) representative and report back on the response via our email contact address: enactgroup@gmail.com

It is probably better to ask only one question per letter – but more than one letter could be sent. If there is a question you think could be added to the list, let us know at the email address above.

1

Context: Australia has often taken the lead in international efforts to solve global problems like climate change through research and innovation. There is concern that we may have given up playing an appropriate part in the international effort to reduce emissions and limit climate related crises.

Question: Could you give an example of a global science-based issue of such importance that you would give it your time and personal capital as our parliamentary representative?

Follow-up: How will you organise and lead collaboration with businesses and across political parties in Australia in confronting the issue you identified?

2

Context: In Australia, as elsewhere in the world, low-carbon energy sources are already cost-competitive with fossil fuels, and authoritative data and forecasts see renewables as being a promising source for well-paying jobs in the future. Countries capable of providing inexpensive low-carbon energy will be the economic leaders of the 21st century. Australia has a huge advantage because of our solar and wind resources.

Question: Many experts say developing and implementing renewable energy presents an enormous opportunity to grow jobs and the economy. Do you agree? If so, how would you make Australia a global leader in this effort?

Follow-up: Do you see a role for private-public partnerships in bringing low-carbon energy sources to market? Which commonwealth or state agencies and what policy initiatives would be key in such

an effort?

3

Context: Australian scientists feel that the integrity of their science is being undermined or ignored and that ministers are not getting the advice they need. This is of real concern if Australia seeks to maintain scientific leadership and attract the best and brightest students.

Question: Is it a priority for you to increase the number of scientists attracted by rejuvenated federally funded research programs?

Follow-up: What would you do to attract increased numbers of qualified scientists and engineers into rewarding work?

4

Context: Many proposals have argued that rebuilding our economy post-COVID offers an historic opportunity to make us safer from the ongoing and future risks of climate disruption. These risks are real – they are already significantly affecting our homes, our lives, our livelihoods, and our health.

Question: We are now planning how to rebuild the Australian economy in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Is this an opportunity to make our infrastructure and society less vulnerable to climate change?

Follow-up: In what ways can action to reduce climate change risks help make Australia more resilient, prosperous, and secure?

5

Context: The COVID-19 vaccines issue presents a concrete example of a potential anti-science bias that would have a significant impact on health and on our healthcare system. Ignoring vaccine science jeopardises the well-being of all Australian citizens – not just those who avoid vaccination.

Question: We soon hope to have a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine. We know, however, that some, and perhaps even many, may refuse it for themselves and their children; they will encourage others to do the same. How will you respond to them?

Follow-up: Effective anti-COVID measures – like the simple wearing of face masks – can so easily become politically divisive issues. What would you do to prevent similar political division in deploying an effective coronavirus vaccine?

6

Context: Australia has one of the highest percentages of climate change deniers in the OECD nations, third of twenty five after the US and Mexico. Although the total number is small - about 8% of the population - the voice of the minority is amplified by sections of the mainstream media. Fossil fuel interests continue to promote mistrust in the science of climate change and slow down our national response. Democratic processes are distorted by corporate donations to political parties and ready access by lobbyists to politicians. At the same time we are seeing a decline in our citizens' trust in democracy.

Question: How would you propose limiting the influence of well-funded lobby groups whose collective voice can drown out the wishes of the majority of our citizens?

Follow-up: The G20 agreed in 2009 to phase out “inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption”. Leaders have reaffirmed this pledge at every summit in the past decade. What actions would you propose to reduce and eventually eliminate the direct and indirect subsidies and tax exemptions that go to the fossil fuel producing companies?