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Energymark: changing Australians' behaviours through kitchen table discussions

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The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's (CSIRO) Energy Transformed Flagship is committed to increasing public awareness and knowledge about climate change and the range of energy technologies available to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to its technical research program, the Flagship has become increasingly aware of the critical role that changing individual energy behaviours will play if we are to be successful in our efforts to mitigate climate change. Our research has shown that while the majority of Australians are concerned about climate change and greenhouse gas mitigation they do not necessarily relate their own energy behaviours as being part of the problem. The step between concern and action can often be huge particularly with the presence of information asymmetries and lack of incentives. As a result, CSIRO has been grappling with the research question: How to create national momentum around the topic of climate change and its relation to energy; that will change the way Australians think and act about energy and climate change mitigation? To address this question CSIRO has developed a co-ordinated initiative called Energymark. Energymark is a new concept for brokering public dialogue about the role that individuals can play in moving towards a new energy future. It is based on the concept that behavioural change requires both knowledge contributions (to change attitudes) and policy implementation (to incentivise action). Energymark addresses the knowledge contribution stage and monitors the effects of policy interventions to bring about large scale behaviour change. Energymark works through a range of small community based networks who commit to a series of kitchen table discussions related to energy and climate change mitigation. Active and interested community members volunteer to be a group convenor. Each group convenor then commits to hosting a series of meetings with a group of their ten friends. Over a period of several months they progress their group through the range of topics, provided by CSIRO, at their own pace. After each discussion, the group convenor provides a short summary of the key points raised and actions that have been committed to by each individual in their group to CSIRO. Questionnaires are used to monitor the changing attitudes, knowledge, behaviours and social networks of the participants at various stages of the process. In addition to bringing about large scale behavioural change, Energymark allows researchers to longitudinally track changing public perceptions to climate change and energy. Over time we are able to identify key triggers, barriers and challenges for various individuals to actively address climate change mitigation at a personal level. The data collected also allows us to map the project's impacts and information flows through the use of social network analysis. The information gathered over time is used to inform a range of stakeholders including policy makers and technical researchers.