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What surplus? Coalition blows the things voters want most

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Education and training, the second-most important issue, was cited by 66 per cent of voters. **Photo: Cathryn Tremain**

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Stopping asylum seeker boats is the federal government's signature domestic policy success this year while it remains in serious trouble with voters on health, education and the economy, according to exclusive polling of the key issues.

And while the government has abolished the carbon tax and replaced it with Direct Action, it has failed to quell concerns about the environment, which has risen to a top-five issue of concern among voters.

Within the environment, voters remain most alarmed about climate change, renewable energy and reducing carbon emissions.

The extensive breakdown of voter concerns is contained in the quarterly *True Issues* survey by JWS Research.

"The government does have a looming policy challenge when it comes to the environment," said JWS pollster John Scales.

One half of voters – 49 per cent – rated the government's performance as either poor or very poor and "there is an undeniable need for government action to address these concerns".

Voters given 11 options

The survey of 1004 voters in late November asked voters to choose from a list of 11 policy areas, the five they regarded as most important and then asked them to nominate within each area the issues of most concern.

Underwhelming

Cost of living issues continue to dominate the economic issues landscape

Economy issues (% of respondents who think it's important)



Since the first such survey in June 2013, during the last months of the Labor government, the most notable improvement in performance by the government came in immigration and border security, jumping from 12 per cent to 33 per cent.

Consequently, immigration and border security has dropped to number eight as an issue of concern.

The survey found, following an initial boost in confidence after the - federal election perceptions of government performance had flatlined with 24 per cent regarding the government as doing a good job. There is no change in the four surveys conducted since November last year.

In the latest survey, 43 per cent believed the government was doing poorly or very poorly.

Pessimism on the economy had also become entrenched after a post-election bounce. Today, 23 per cent believed it was headed in the right direction and 33 per cent in the wrong direction.

Mr Scales said a big concern for the government was that the voters still marked it down on the issues they most cared about and this had remained unchanged all year.

Concerns on budget cuts

Health was cited by 84 per cent as important but just 16 per cent thought the government was doing a good job and 50 per cent rated it as poor or very poor. Federal budget cuts elevated concerns. Health areas considered most important were availability of beds, health funding and the cost of medicines.

Similarly, education and training, the second-most important issue, was cited by 66 per cent of voters. The top order issues inside education and training were the cost of education and higher education funding. The budget had cut education funding to the states and tried to cut university funding.

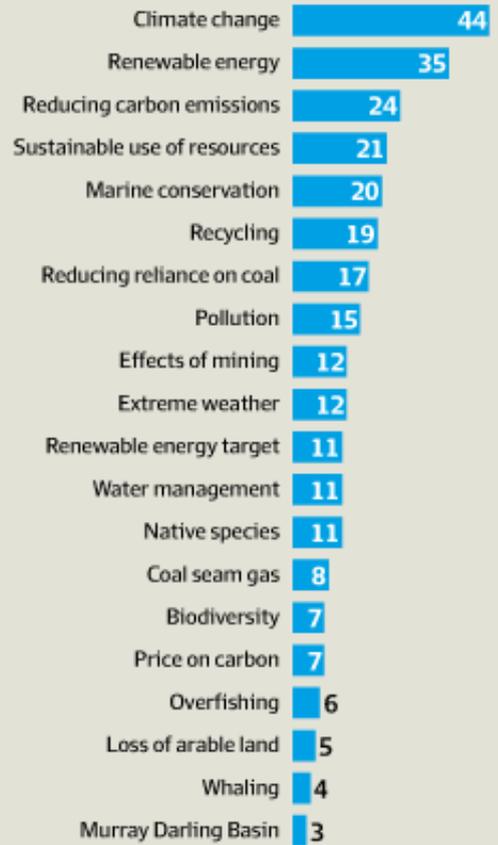
The economy was the third most important issue and of those who - nominated it, 61 per cent listed the cost of living as the key concern.

Just 15 per cent cited a budget surplus as important and only 7 per cent supported a change to the GST. The figures suggested the government faced big hurdles trying to balance the budget, let alone begin a national conversation about tax reform.

Infrastructure equalled the environment as a top-five issue and roads and public transport got equal billing.

Almost a third of Australians rate the government's performance on the environment as very poor

Environment issues (% who think it's important)



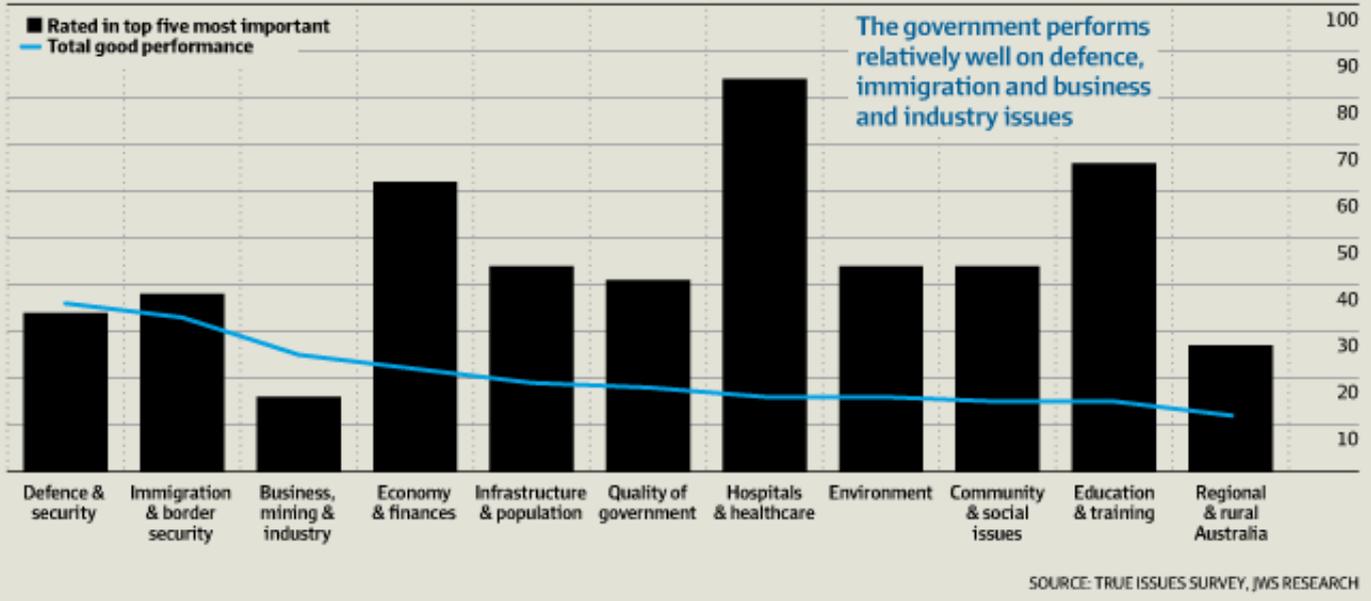
Key points

- Stopping refugee boats is a big win but the government is still in trouble on health, education and the economy.
- Environmental concerns are high on voters' lists.

Underwhelming

How the Abbott government is performing on key issues

Issues rated important to voters v performance rating (% of respondents)



The Australian Financial Review



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