

# Climate change is awful . . . over there.



## RESEARCH

‘Cross-cultural evidence for spatial bias in beliefs about the severity of environmental problems’

by Professor Wesley Schultz, Dr. Taciano L. Milfont, Randie C. Chance, Giuseppe Tronu, Sílvia Luís, Kaori Ando, Faiz Rasool, Pamela Linera Roose, Charles Adedayo Ogunbode, Juana Castro, & Valdiney V. Gouveia (2014)

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## Background

Environmental problems pose a threat to the future of our planet.

People tend to believe that other places and people are more likely to be at environmental risk than their local communities.

Professor Taciano Milfont from the Centre for Applied Cross-Cultural Research, part of Victoria University of Wellington, and collaborators from around the world examined the opinions of people from 22 countries about their beliefs on the severity of environmental problems, like deforestation, water pollution, air pollution, land

## Main research findings

People from all over the world typically think that the global environmental problems are worse than local ones.

People who are more likely to believe that environmental problems are worse elsewhere than in their local community tend to:

pollution, overpopulation, and global warming, locally and globally.

- live in countries with higher average happiness levels,
- live in counties with higher levels of environmental sustainability,
- be younger,
- have higher levels of concern for the environment, and □ grow up in smaller communities.

## Relevance of findings to New Zealand

New Zealanders tend to discount the severity of local environmental problems.

Environmental problems are thought to occur in far-off places, not in Aotearoa.

Living in a happy, eco-friendly nation, New Zealanders are particularly susceptible to the false beliefs that environmental issues are not a concern in New Zealand.

Environmental advocates, like the Department of Conservation and others working to sustain New Zealand’s natural habitat, need to focus on environmental degradation within New Zealand to encourage eco-friendly behaviours among Kiwis and raise general concern over these issues.