

**AUSTRALIAN
DEMOCRATS**

YOUTH POLL 2008

1. Introduction

I initiated Youth Poll in 1992 - before I became a senator - to give young people an opportunity to have a say. For 16 years, the poll has fulfilled this role successfully, giving thousands of young Australians from two generations a forum to express themselves, and, in the process, providing valuable insight into their ideas and attitudes.

Youth Poll is aimed at 15 to 20 year-olds and is distributed to schools, TAFEs, universities, youth and church groups, and welfare, charity and community organisations in every State and Territory.

Youth Poll asks young people age 15 to 20 about employment, health, education and training and a range of other issues.

This poll is part of our commitment to recognise the contribution young people make and the importance of including their views in the political process.

Young Australians continue to search for new opportunities, greater understanding and a platform from which to voice their views. Often, young people's views and opinions are misrepresented, ignored or stereotyped.

Youth Poll 2008 (also available at www.natashastottdespoja.com) provides an insight into how young Australians feel about themselves, their place in society, and the issues important to them.

While Youth Poll reveals a diversity of opinions on various issues, the results show that many young people are united in their concerns and opinions.

Youth Poll not only provides a great opportunity for young people to have a say, it also gives policy-makers the chance to incorporate these

views into policy to reflect the interests and concerns of young people. Youth Poll is just one way we seek to represent better the interests of young Australians.

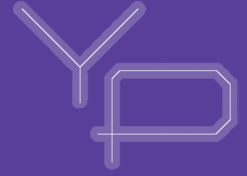
As my Senate term ends on June 30 this year, this is my last Youth Poll. I thank those who have participated in the poll over 16 years and hope others will take on this initiative so it continues to be a voice for young people in the future.

I urge the new Government to increase opportunities for young people to participate in the political process, including by providing a forum such as the Youth Poll.



Natasha Stott Despoja
Senator for South Australia





2. Demographics

2.1 Age

Youth Poll questioned people between the ages of 15 and 20.

2.2 Sex

Males and females are equally represented.

2.3 Residence

Respondents come from all States and Territories, and live in urban, regional and remote areas.

Most respondents live with family, but others live with friends, alone, are homeless, or have alternative living arrangements.

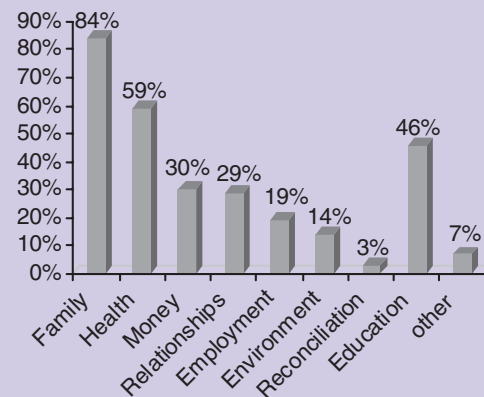
A recent report revealed, despite 15 years of economic growth, the number of homeless youth in Australia doubled to 22,000 since 1989.¹

2.4 Important issues

Young people were asked to nominate the issues most important to them from a list of nine.

Family is the most important issue, nominated by 84% of respondents.

Health trails family, nominated by 59% of respondents, followed by education on 46%.



Mission Australia's 2007 survey of young Australians revealed that body image, alcohol and family conflict were young people's top concerns.²

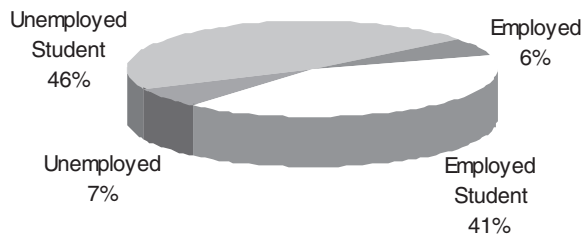
In the 1992 Youth Poll, young people reported family, employment and the environment as issues of most importance.³

3. Employment

3.1 Employment Status

87% of Youth Poll respondents are in education or training. Of these, 46% are unemployed students and 41% are employed students.

6% of respondents are employed and 7% are unemployed. Overall, 47%, including students, are in some form of employment.

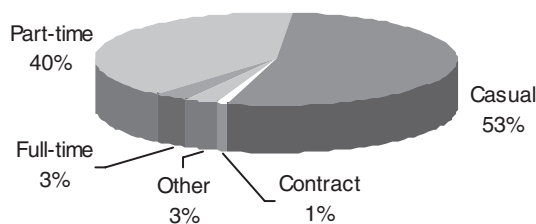


A 2007 survey showed around 86% of teenagers are working or studying full time.⁴

In 1993, 48% of Youth Poll respondents - including students - were in some form of employment.⁵

3.2 Type of Employment

Only 3% of employed respondents are working full-time, 4% less than last year's poll. Most of the other employed respondents (53%) are in casual employment, and 40% work part-time.



Two-thirds of employed respondents - not including students - were working full-time, according to the 1992 Youth Poll.⁶

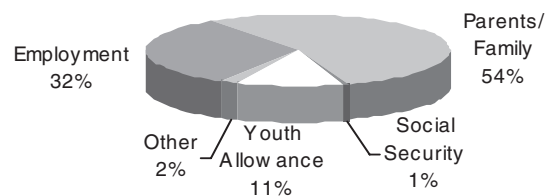
3.3 Source of Income

What is your main source of income?

More than half of respondents (54%) rely on their parents or family for income.

Work is the main source of income for 32% of respondents.

11% of respondents identify Youth Allowance as their main source of income, up 2% from last year, 2% rely on other forms of income and 1% on other social security benefits.



Employment was the main source of income for 36% of 1992 Youth Poll respondents.⁷

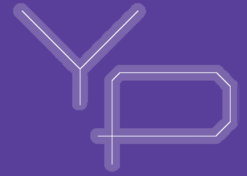
3.4 Industrial Relations Changes

Do you support the new Federal Government overturning the Industrial Relations changes (Workchoices)?

63% support the overturning of Workchoices.



The Government has begun dismantling Workchoices, passing laws to ban new Australian Workplace Agreements.⁸



4. Health

4.1 Youth Suicide

Do you know a young person who has attempted or committed suicide?

Almost half of respondents (46%) report knowing a young person who has attempted or committed suicide.



In 1997, 63% of Youth Poll respondents knew another young person who had committed or attempted suicide.⁹

Kids Helpline - 1800 551 800
Lifeline - 13 11 14

4.2 Drugs

Have you ever tried marijuana?

21% of respondents have tried marijuana, 6% less than last year, continuing a decreasing trend.

Almost two-thirds of respondents to the 1992 Youth Poll had tried marijuana.¹⁰

Have you ever tried amphetamines or hallucinogens (such as Ecstasy, Speed or LSD)?

Only 7% of this year's participants have tried amphetamines or hallucinogens. This is a decrease of 7% on last year's poll.

In 1996, 23% of respondents to the Youth Poll had tried amphetamines or hallucinogens.¹¹

Do you smoke?

14% of those surveyed smoke, a decrease of 2% since 2007.



A recent Victorian survey revealed a 30% increase in the number of 18-29 year-olds quitting smoking.¹²

The 1996 Youth Poll reported that 23% of respondents smoked.¹³

Do you binge drink?

21% of respondents report that they binge drink.



In any week, 10% of 12-17 year-olds report binge drinking at harmful levels - 7 or more drinks for males and 5 or more for females in one day.¹⁴

In March, the Government announced funding of \$53.5 million allocated to address binge drinking.¹⁵

A 2008 National Youth Week Forum found that the media tends to unfairly stereotype young people, particularly in relation to alcohol consumption, when only a small minority binge drink.¹⁶

In the 1993 Poll, 11% of females and 22% of males said they drank "often".¹⁷

4.3 Body Image

Are you concerned about the issue of body image?

More than half of respondents (54%) are concerned about body image.



Body image refers to how a person feels about and views themselves. Poor body image means a person has a distorted view of themselves, often thinking they are bigger than they are.¹⁸

Recent estimates show 45% of women and 23% of men believe they are overweight, despite being within a healthy weight range.¹⁹

Mission Australia's 2007 survey revealed body image was young people's top concern.²⁰

Body image was an issue for young people in the 1992 Youth Poll, with 59% admitting to dieting.²¹

4.4 Social Networking

Do you have a social networking site such as Myspace or Facebook?

64% of respondents have a social networking site.



Worldwide, there are 70 million active users of Facebook.²²

Have you or a friend ever felt threatened or upset by someone you came in to contact with on the internet?

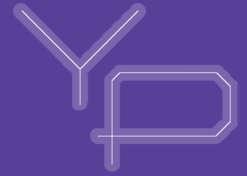
22% of respondents report that they or a friend had felt threatened or upset by someone they came in to contact with on the internet.



13% of young respondents to a 2004 Youth Internet Safety Survey had "received an unwanted sexual solitation in the past year".²³

Some Australian schools are implementing a "Cyber Citizen" course to encourage students to treat online correspondents respectfully.²⁴

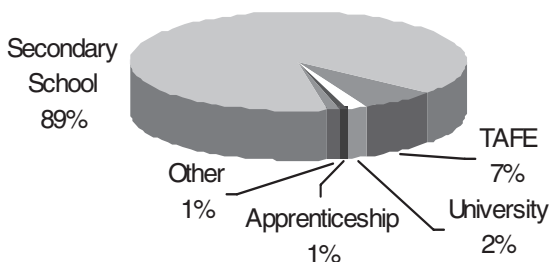
5. Education and Training



87% of Youth Poll 2008 participants are in some form of education or training.

Of these, 89% attend secondary school, an increase of 6% from last year, and 7% are enrolled at TAFE.

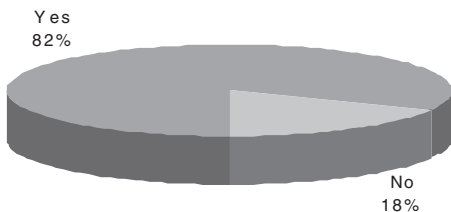
Respondents undertaking university study decreased to 2% from 6% in last year's poll. 1% are doing apprenticeships, and 1% are in other forms of education and training.



In the 1996 Youth Poll, 74% attended secondary school, 19% were at university, and 5.3% at TAFE.²⁵

Should higher education be publicly funded?

An overwhelming 82% of respondents believe higher education should be publicly funded.



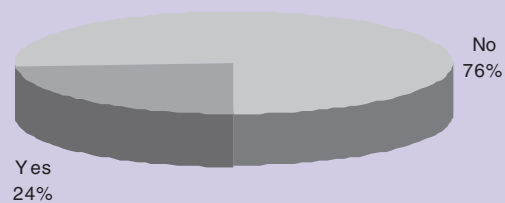
Between 1994 and 2004, Australia was the only developed country to cut public spending on education.²⁶

77% of 1996 Youth Poll respondents thought higher education should be free.²⁷

5.1 Youth Allowance

Are you receiving Youth Allowance or a scholarship?

76% of respondents are not receiving Youth Allowance or a scholarship.

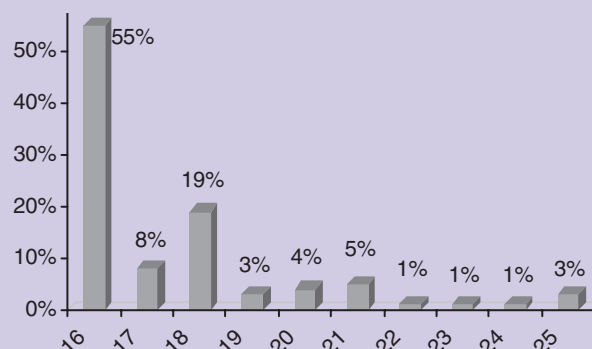


The AVCC *Australian University Student Finances 2006* report showed 12.8% of undergraduates had their application for income support rejected, up from 8.7% in 2000.²⁸

27% of 2001 Youth Poll participants received Youth Allowance or a scholarship.²⁹

What should the Youth Allowance age of independence be?

55% of respondents believe the Youth Allowance age of independence should be 16, 19% believe 18, while 8% believe 17, and, a further 5% believe 21. Only 3% of the respondents believe the age of independence should be 25, as it is set by the Government.



Under current legislation, students under 25 years of age are considered financially dependent on their parents (with certain exceptions).³⁰ Parental assets and income, including the family home, jewellery and salary are assessed in determining whether a student should receive income support.³¹ Those who qualify for income support, but are considered 'dependent', receive just over half the 'independent' allowance.³²

Since the question was first posed (in 2001), Youth Poll respondents have consistently nominated 16 as the preferred Youth Allowance age of independence.

Are the current levels of student assistance adequate?

Nearly half (49%) of the participants believe current levels of support are not adequate.

Current Youth Allowance rates, not including Rent Assistance, are:³³

Status	Allowance Paid Per Fortnight
Single, no children:	
Under 18, at home	\$194.50
Under 18, away from home	\$355.40
18 and over, away from home	\$355.40
18 and over, at home	\$233.90
Single, with children	\$465.60
Partnered, no children	\$355.40
Partnered with children	\$390.20
Special rate for long-term unemployed or migrant English students 21 years or over commencing full-time study:	
Single, living at home	\$287.20
Single, living away from home	\$431.90
Partnered, no children	\$390.20

58% of the 2002 Youth Poll respondents said the levels of student assistance were inadequate.³⁴

5.2 Higher Education

Should the new Federal Government reverse Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU)?

59% of those surveyed do not believe the VSU legislation should be reversed.

A study on the impact of VSU reported the loss of more than 1000 student services jobs (more than 30%) since the introduction of VSU.³⁵

Do you support the Federal Government abolishing full-fee university places for Australian students?

63% of those polled support the abolition of full-fee university places for domestic students.

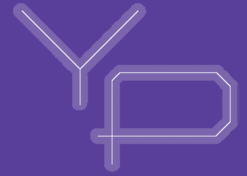


The 2007 Good Universities Guide included 94 university courses costing more than \$100 000, and the number was expected to exceed 100 this year, a doubling over just 4 years.³⁶

The Federal Government has promised to abolish full-fee paying undergraduate places from 2009.³⁷

In 2005, 69% of Youth Poll respondents rejected full-fee paying students entering university with lower marks than HECS students.³⁸

6. National Issues



Although most Youth Poll respondents are below the voting age, they hold strong opinions on a range of issues.

Some young people feel frustrated by their inability to directly influence decisions that affect them, and the difficulty in making their voices heard in the wider community.

Many young Australians have a strong social conscience and are often highly engaged in political issues. It is usually party politics with which they may not identify.

6.1 Asylum Seekers

Do you support the mandatory detention of asylum seekers?

58% of participants do not support the mandatory detention of asylum seekers, compared with 64% last year and 60% in 2005.

In February, the last asylum seekers on Nauru were transported to Australia, bringing an apparent end to the so-called “Pacific solution” where asylum seekers who did not reach the mainland were processed on Nauru or Manus Islands.³⁹ However, asylum seekers will still be processed on Christmas Island.⁴⁰

In 2002, 59% of respondents did not support mandatory detention.⁴¹

6.2 NT Intervention

Do you support the Federal Government’s intervention in NT Aboriginal communities?

62% of respondents support the Northern Territory Intervention.



6.3 Climate Change

Do you support the Federal Government signing the Kyoto Protocol?

An overwhelming 72% of respondents agree with the Government signing the Kyoto Protocol.



The new Government’s first official act was to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.⁴²

In 1997, a decisive 89% of Youth Poll participants believed the Government was not doing enough for the environment.⁴³

6.4 Iraq war

Do you support the Federal Government's troop withdrawal from Iraq?

More than three-quarters of respondents (79%) support the withdrawal of troops from Iraq.

The Government has promised to withdraw 550 combat troops from Southern Iraq by mid 2008, following the completion of the current six month rotation.⁴⁴

6.5 Same-sex marriage

Do you support same-sex marriage?

More than half of respondents (58%) support same-sex marriage.

In a 2007 Galaxy Poll, 57% supported same-sex marriage and 71% believed same-sex couples should attract the same legal rights as heterosexual defacto couples.⁴⁵

6.6 Republic

Should Australia be a Republic?

44% of respondents are in favour of Australia becoming a Republic.

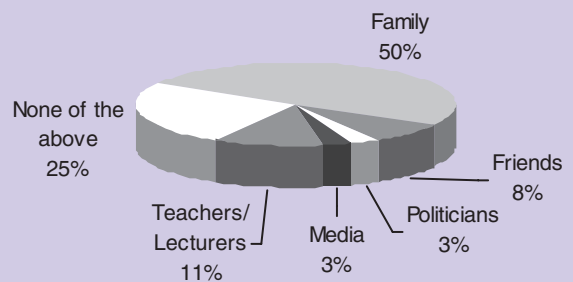
In April, the Prime Minister said although it was not a "top-order priority", the Government is committed to Australia becoming a Republic.⁴⁶

Youth Poll 1999 reported an overwhelming 84% of respondents believed Australia should become a Republic.⁴⁷

6.7 Trust

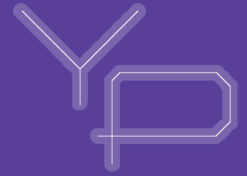
Who do you trust most on the subject of politics?

Two major sources of political information, the media and politicians, are the least trusted in this year's Youth Poll, each scoring just 3% of the vote, confirming that young people remain wary of 'official' sources of political information.



Family is the leading source of political information, with the category 'none' again receiving the second highest response - 25%. Teachers and lecturers follow at 11%, with friends at 8%.

The 1999 Youth Poll reported media as the most trusted source of political information, followed by teachers and lecturers.⁴⁸



7. State Issues

Each respondent answered one of the following questions, depending on their State or Territory.

NT

Should the NT become a State?

Nearly half of respondents (47%) believe the Northern Territory should become a State.

In 2005, the Statehood Steering Committee was established to “consult widely and educate Territorians about statehood.”⁴⁹

According to the Statehood website, “Statehood at it’s most basic means more decision making in the Territory and less chance of the Commonwealth changing Territory laws.”⁵⁰

ACT

Should the voting age be lowered to 16?

A majority (72%) of ACT respondents do not want the voting age lowered to 16.

A 2007 survey of young Canberrans found support for lowering the voting age, provided sufficient information on politics and parties was made available.⁵¹

SA

Do you support the State Government’s proposed de-salination plant?

69% of SA respondents are in favour of the construction of a de-salination plant.

The South Australian State Government announced in April it will fast-track the construction of the \$1.1 billion de-salination plant.⁵²

Construction will start in 2009, to be completed by late 2011.⁵³

NSW

Do you support the new license conditions for P-platers?

Only 38% of New South Wales respondents support the new license conditions for P-platers.

New conditions include: License suspension for any speeding offence for P1 drivers and provisional riders; and, under-25s can not drive between 11pm and 5am with more than one passenger under the age of 21.⁵⁴

VIC

Is Victorian public transport adequate?

More than half of Victorian respondents (51%) believe public transport is not adequate.

A 2007 survey of Victorian commuters rated the system 60 out of 100, complaining of overcrowding and services failing to run on time.⁵⁵

WA

Have rental and house prices stopped you from moving out of home?

More than half (53%) of Western Australian respondents believe house and rental prices have prevented them from leaving home.

Rental vacancy rates in WA dropped from 2.5% to 1.9% in 2007, while rental costs increased by 23% or \$60 a week.⁵⁶

QLD

Should 17 year-olds continue to be imprisoned in adult prisons?

55% of Queensland respondents believe 17 year-olds should not be incarcerated in adult prisons.

In 2007, 34 seventeen year-olds were in custody in adult prisons.⁵⁷

In May last year, the Queensland Government announced it would maintain the “status quo” in incarcerating 17 year-olds - who commit offences after they turn 17 - in adult prisons.⁵⁸

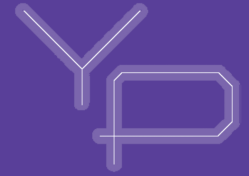
The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended the Queensland Government remove 17 year-olds from adult prisons.⁵⁹

TAS

Should the Tamar Valley Pulp Mill go ahead?

A minority - 39% - of Tasmanian respondents believe the Tamar Valley Pulp Mill should proceed.

In a November 2007 poll, 54% of Tasmanians expressed opposition to the Pulp Mill.⁶⁰



Conclusion - a snapshot of young Australians

As with previous years, family, followed by health and education are the most important issues in the lives of a majority of young Australians.

While most respondents are involved in education and training, a large percentage are also employed, but on a casual basis. Most believe education should be publicly funded and that levels of student income support are insufficient.

The majority support the Government overturning the Workchoices legislation.

There is a significant decrease in the number of respondents who know a young person who has attempted or committed suicide, although the number remains alarmingly high.

Marijuana use and smoking are both becoming rarer, with decreases of 6% and 2% respectively. Surprisingly - given the current government and media focus on its prevalence - the number of respondents admitting to binge drinking declined 7% since the 2007 poll.

More than half of respondents are concerned with the issue of body image.

This year's poll gauged the importance of the internet in young people's lives, with nearly three-quarters having a social networking site. However, the dark side of the internet is also apparent, with a significant number - more than one fifth - saying they have been upset or felt threatened by someone they came into contact with online.

A majority of participants believe the Government should not reverse Voluntary Student Unionism but should abolish full-fee degrees for domestic students.

A majority of respondents supports the Northern Territory intervention.

Nearly three-quarters agree with the Government signing the Kyoto Protocol.

A convincing majority agree with the withdrawal of Australian troops from Iraq.

More than half support same-sex marriage.

Mirroring last year's result - a Youth Poll first - support for a Republic has once again dropped, hovering below 50%.

Young people have maintained the trend of drifting away from traditional sources of political information, with politicians and the media once again relegated to bottom rung, while a significant quarter of respondents trusts no one.

The issue of Statehood has evenly divided NT respondents.

Only 28% of ACT respondents want the voting age lowered to 16.

A large majority of South Australians support construction of a de-salination plant.

Most NSW respondents reject the new P-plater license conditions.

Victorians are evenly divided over the adequacy of their transport system.

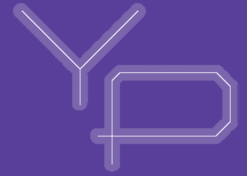
A small majority of WA respondents believe housing and rental prices have kept them at home.

More than half of Queensland respondents do not support 17 year-olds being incarcerated in adult prisons.

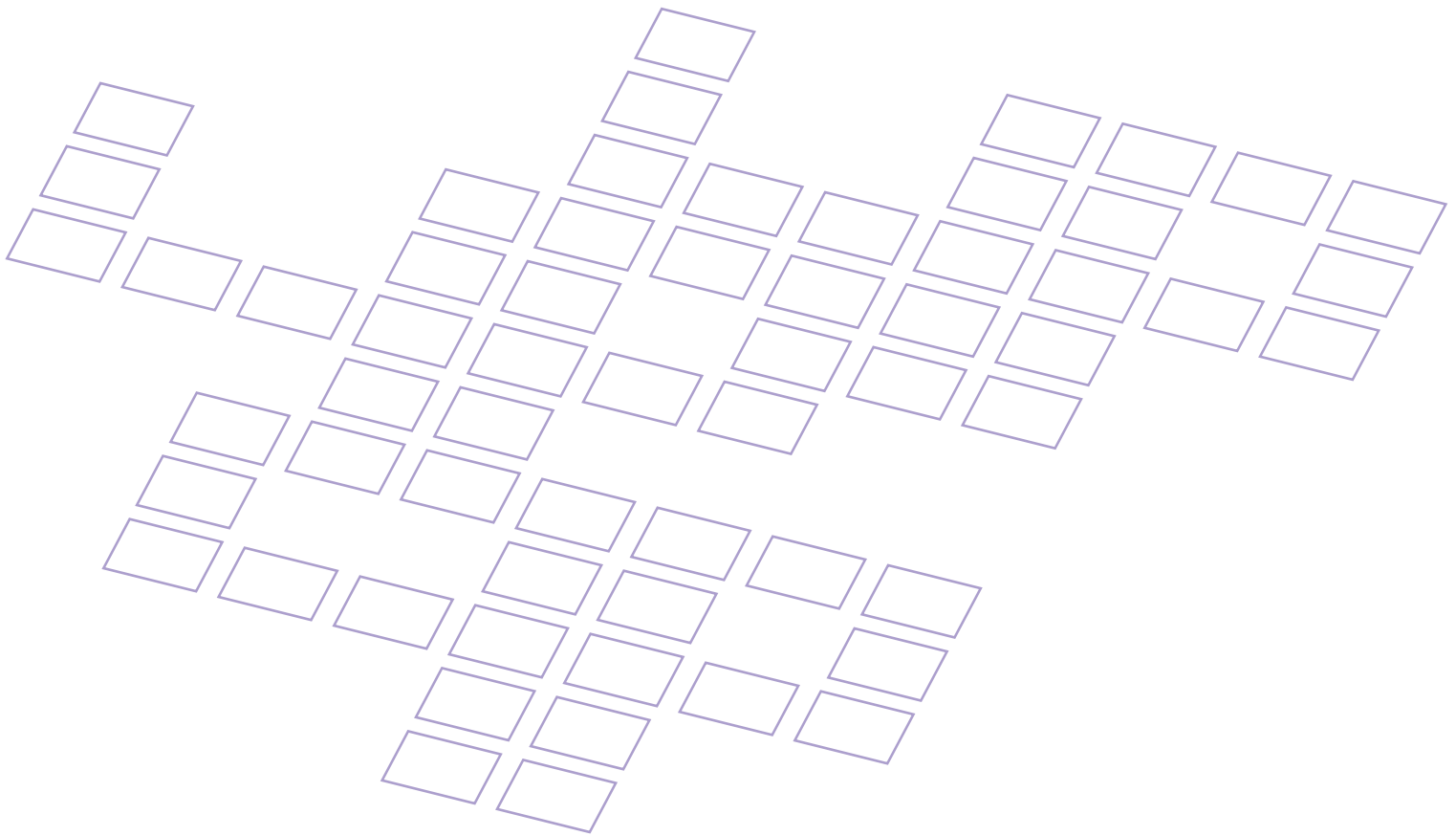
Most Tasmanians - 61% - do not want the Tamar Valley Pulp Mill to go ahead.

FOOTNOTES

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2. *National Survey of Young Australians 2007: Key and emerging issues* p.23 Mission Australia
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30. http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/qual_ind_yal.htm
31. *ibid*
You are considered independent if you are aged 16 years or over and have earned an amount equivalent to 75% of the National Training Wage Award Rate in an 18 month period before lodging a claim; working full-time at least 30 hours a week during the preceding two years (or for a period or periods of 12 months if you are considered disadvantaged); or have worked part-time for at least 15 hours a week for at least two years since last leaving school; or are 25 or more and a full-time student (in special circumstances). You are also considered independent if you are aged 15-24 and are above school leaving age in your state or territory; and are a refugee, an orphan or it is unreasonable for you to live at home; or are in state care, or only stopped being in state care because of your age; have, or have had a dependent child; are, or have been married, including living in a marriage-like relationship for 12 months or more, or six months (in special circumstances) ; or have parents who have those responsibilities.
32. http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/payments/pay_how_yal.htm
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51. "ACT to consider lowering the voting age" *ABC Online* 26/09/07 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2007/09/26/2043628.htm>
52. "Adelaide desal to be fast-tracked" *ABC Online* 3/4/08 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/04/03/2207287.htm?section=justin>
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