**If you’re watching this video, which of course you are, then there’s a decent chance you’re already aware of the climate emergency we’re facing, and you may have even started to make some changes in your own lifestyle to contribute towards an overall reduction in your emissions of greenhouse gases.**

**But a new survey conducted across nine western nations suggests that the majority of people have convinced themselves that the most important climate actions also just happen to either be things they can achieve without affecting their current lifestyle at all, or they’re large-scale activities that are outside the control of individual citizens.**

**So, does this view reflect reality, or is it yet another case of our amazing human ability to shove our heads in the sand?**

**Hello and welcome to Just Have Another Think, our monthly look at the ecological, environmental and social consequences of our 21st century climate emergency.**

**The recent COP26 climate conference in Glasgow was a perfect example of the power of mass self-delusion. Nearly twenty-six thousand delegates all got together in the same place, and all of them were in possession of the same crystal-clear scientific data demonstrating the impact that greenhouse gas emissions are having on our global atmosphere and the severity of the consequences if we don’t take radical and immediate action. But instead of agreeing urgent and rapid timelines to implement those measures, the delegates essentially did little more than congratulate themselves for having ‘recognised’ the problems and agree to come back next year to have another chat about them, just like they’ve been doing for more than two decades since the first COP meeting took place in Berlin back in nineteen ninety-five.**

**And that delusional state of mind has become an intrinsic part of the messaging that our governments and corporations provide to consumers like you and me, which means most folks still don’t have a clear idea of what needs to be done and how quickly it needs to happen.**

**To coincide with the COP26 meeting a public policy research organisation called Kantar Public, whose clients include many mainstream organisations like these, conducted a survey of nine thousand representative adults aged eighteen and over across these nine countries, asking specific questions about the environment and climate.**

**And at first glance it looks like the general public… generally gets it.**

**Overall, seventy eight percent of people across the nine countries said they felt concerned about climate change. And when asked to prioritise the three main environmental challenges facing the world, sixty two percent put climate change firmly at the top.**

**But when the survey respondents were asked to evaluate their own personal commitment to protecting the environment and planetary ecosystems, they gave themselves a mean rating of 6.4 out of 10, with thirty six percent giving themselves a rating between eight and ten out of ten, compared to only about five out of ten for media, government and even other people in their own neighbourhood!**

**And their perception of the actions of large corporations was even harsher. Big companies came bottom of the list of good and bad actors, with a mean rating of only four point five out of ten for their commitment to environmental issues.**

**Across all the countries only seventeen percent of respondents gave their national government a rating of seven or more out of ten, with Germany, France and Poland all particularly scathing about their current administrations.**

**Forty two percent said their governments needed a higher sense of responsibility with thirty four percent suggesting there should be a greater willingness to invest more in tackling the climate challenge.**

**But, with the exception of Singapore, we individuals reckon we’re far more committed to the cause than those in power, as this chart shows only too clearly.**

**So, I think it’s fair to say that we consumers have got a pretty positive view of ourselves and a pretty dim view of others.**

**But is that perception borne out by the facts? Well, the survey drills down into more detailed analysis to come up with some answers to exactly that question.**

**Here’s an interesting juxtaposition of results to demonstrate the ambiguity of attitudes… while more than three quarters of respondents say they would be prepared to accept stricter rules and environmental regulations, it seems that many of them don’t think those rules would apply to them because fewer than half think that they’d really need to change their own habits at all. So already we’ve got a bit of a disconnect between what people say and what people are actually prepared to do.**

**And the gap between personal environmental values and individual actions grows ever wider as the survey goes on.**

**According to the Kantar report, when asked about potential solutions to the climate crisis people tend to prefer innovation and technological solutions over individual and collective efforts to affect change. And when give the choice between legal enforcement and obligation or encouragement and persuasion to preserve the environment, suddenly the majority of people would much rather take the second option.**

**Funny that isn’t it?**

**But perhaps the most revealing result of the entire survey comes when people are asked to place a set of very specific climate mitigation actions in priority order of importance. Here’s where the accuracy of our collective climate perception really begins to unravel.**

**The most important activity to “save the planet”, say fifty seven percent of our survey respondents, is reducing waste and increasing recycling. Now, there’s nothing wrong with those two activities. They are indeed very important aspects of modern life. But they’re already happening and generally speaking they’re pretty well organised and entrenched in our every day lives, so continuing to reduce waste and improve recycling amounts to pretty much a zero-effort lifestyle tweak for the vast majority of people in rich western nations.**

**The next four priorities are also all perfectly laudible aspirations, especially stopping deforestation and building energy efficient buildings, but if you think about it, none of them can be controlled or achieved by an individual taking personal responsibility for their own actions can they? They’re all things that ‘other people’ need to do inside some faceless corporation or administration somewhere else. Somewhere that we don’t have to get involved with.**

**Replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy comes in at priority number six, and that is certainly something that many people could do in their own homes, but again most folks answering this question are really only referring to actions required by centralised energy providers rather than by individuals.**

**In fact, all the really significant changes that would make a genuinely positive impact on climate mitigation, but which would require significant changes to people’s lifestyles, all tumble towards the bottom half of the priority list.**

**Only a quarter of respondents think we should favour public transport over cars.**

**Even fewer people think that air travel should be reduced.**

**Just twenty two percent think that banning fossil fuel vehicles is an important step and of course, the real elephant in the room is good old meat consumption, with fewer than a fifth of respondents accepting that they need to prioritise a reduction in the amount of meat they eat each week.**

**So, the survey delved a little further to ask directly how respondents felt about taking personal actions to preserve the environment and planet. Only about half said they would definitely make tangible changes in their lifestyle. About a third of people said they felt ‘torn’ stating that there are ‘reasons why I should, but also reasons why I shouldn’t’, and fourteen percent said they would not be taking any actions at all.**

**And here’s where we humans are absolute masters at finding all sort of reasons to justify our own actions, or in this case - inactions.**

**The survey found that sixty nine percent felt they needed more resources and equipment to act.**

**Sixty percent said they can’t afford to make changes.**

**Fifty five percent suggested they were missing information and clear guidance and thirty nine percent don’t believe that individual effort can really have an impact.**

**To compound all those misgivings, seventy nine percent of respondents think there is no agreement among experts on what the best solutions are, despite the fact that the scientific evidence is extremely robust indeed.**

**The result of all that seems to be that many people have adopted a ‘wait and see’ kind of attitude. And that’s completely in keeping with the classic normal distribution curve or bell curve that our friends in marketing adopted more than half a century ago to predict how consumers would adopt new products. Over here you’ve got the laggards who are extremely reluctant to change at all. Over on the other side you’ve got the early adopters who dive into a new technology or product, or on this case lifestyle, pretty much as soon as it’s available. And then there’s the huge bump in the middle which represents the vast majority of us, all of whom are kind of neither here nor there… just sort of watching each other and waiting for someone else to take a lead so that they can decide whether it’s safe to follow. That’s human nature in a nutshell really. It’s one of the reasons why in the latter half of the twentieth century it wasn’t difficult for the tobacco industry to sow tiny seeds of doubt in people’s minds about whether smoking really was unhealthy or not. And those seeds of doubt were just enough to slow down changes in people’s behaviour. That’s why it took decades for governments to achieve reductions in the numbers of people who smoke. It was the same story with road safety and things like dangerous pesticides and chemical waste, and of course it’s precisely the same situation with the fossil fuel industry.**

**The trouble is, as the Kantar report points out, the experts from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change, or IPCC have warned us in no uncertain terms that we don’t have decades at our disposal to keep the consequences of global warming within manageable limits.**

**So, if you haven’t got round to making your New Year’s resolutions yet, it might be worth having a think about what you really can achieve in your own life once you’ve swept away all the dubious reasons for inactivity and stopped watching what other people are doing. Because if every one of us did that, then things would change very quickly indeed.**

**Thanks for watching, Happy New Year, and I’ll see you next week.**