

**Associate Professor Brett Neilson
Centre for Cultural Research
University of Western Sydney**

Dispositions to Change

I want to start with a brief statement about the relevance of cultural research for climate change interventions. I have chosen the title 'Dispositions to change'. This is because cultural research is a field that has the capacity to intervene not only at the level of stated public positions or policy. It can also shed light on the more complex everyday dispositions or tendencies that individuals and social groups exhibit towards 21st-century challenges such as climate change.

Cultural researchers believe that confronting issues in their full complexity is the most practical path to generating innovative and effective approaches to contemporary social and cultural problems. This means that our investigations can never be limited to black and white scenarios of skepticism versus science or one policy program versus another.

We are interested in how and why such debates form and we also take positions within them. But our more fundamental aim is to discern and to intervene in practices of everyday life. With respect to climate change this means pursuing research that seeks to gain a subtle understanding of how our personal and social dispositions, habits and actions relate to the large-scale, indeed global, transformations and debates at hand.

Cultural research on climate change is valuable for two reasons. First, it can assist institutions and policy makers in identifying strategies to involve citizens in the debate and the decision making processes. In the Australian Research Council project in which many of the speakers today are involved, we seek to do this in collaboration with the museum sector.

Secondly, cultural research sheds light on another arena of politics and decision-making that tends to fall outside the sway of policies and parliaments. This is the sphere of everyday cultural life in which individuals, households and groups make small but significant decisions about their carbon-burning practices. Without an understanding of the complexities of these decisions, which can be represented but never fully apprehended through statistics, it is very difficult for governmental initiatives to gain acceptance in the community.

Of course, it can be dangerous to draw too stark an opposition between formal politics and everyday life. The relation between the two is always skewed by considerations of economy and infrastructure. But without a sophisticated attempt to understand the movement between these different political spheres, it is unlikely that we will be able to shift ingrained habits that make the task of achieving reduced carbon emissions so difficult to achieve.