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# EcoA Tips

Notes & news from EcoAnalytics Research

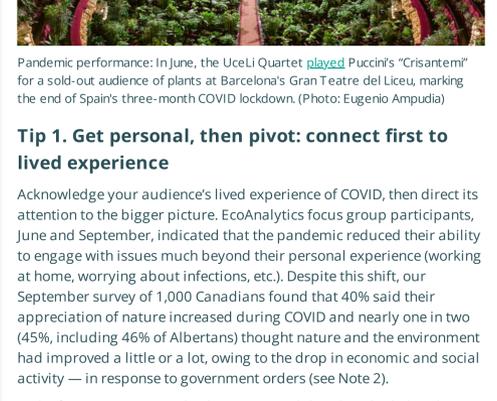
Welcome Members and Subscribers to the first issue of *EcoA Tips*, which will arrive in your mailbox every two months. Here's what's below — scroll on!

## Five tips on talking about the environment during COVID:

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## Five tips on talking about the environment during COVID



Pandemic performance: In June, the UceLi Quartet [played](#) Puccini's "Crisantemi" for a sold-out audience of plants at Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu, marking the end of Spain's three-month COVID lockdown. (Photo: Eugenio Ampudia)

### Tip 1. Get personal, then pivot: connect first to lived experience

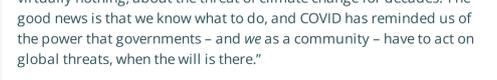
Acknowledge your audience's lived experience of COVID, then direct its attention to the bigger picture. EcoAnalytics focus group participants, June and September, indicated that the pandemic reduced their ability to engage with issues much beyond their personal experience (working at home, worrying about infections, etc.). Despite this shift, our September survey of 1,000 Canadians found that 40% said their appreciation of nature increased during COVID and nearly one in two (45%, including 46% of Albertans) thought nature and the environment had improved a little or a lot, owing to the drop in economic and social activity — in response to government orders (see Note 2).

In the focus groups, people also mentioned that they think that the government needs to lead and "set the rules" because individuals won't act on their own. During the lock-down, people saw direct tangible evidence of our impact on environmental problems – but they believe longer-term change is only possible if the government shows the way.

For example, talk about Canadians' appreciation of cleaner air, then link this to government leadership and social cohesion in tackling COVID ("we worked together to protect each other"). You could then underscore how a similar approach would diminish the danger of global warming. Erick Lachapelle recommends testing this messaging with images of clear skies and clean water, etc.

**Notes:** 1) On the matter of epidemics that leap the species barriers (such as COVID), check out this [novel argument](#) for radical conservation and the cost of pandemics; 2) In terms of reduced carbon emissions, sadly, [a new report](#) suggests COVID has done little to *clear the air*.

### Tip 2. Push preparedness: most agree COVID is a big lesson in prep



This graph, from a national omnibus poll in September (by Environics on behalf of EcoAnalytics), shows levels of agreement with the assertion "The pandemic has made me more aware of the need to act now on other crises like climate change before they get worse."

Nearly two out of three Canadians (63%) agree that COVID reveals the importance of preparing for other major emergencies facing Canada, including climate change, according to an EcoAnalytics poll in September. Try leveraging this connection.

For example, test this narrative: "Despite our experience with SARS and avian flu, our governments failed to prepare us for this pandemic, and its devastating effects. In the same way, we have known, and done virtually nothing, about the threat of climate change for decades. The good news is that we know what to do, and COVID has reminded us of the power that governments – and we as a community – have to act on global threats, when the will is there."

Don't, however, assume people will understand the urgency of acting on climate change. As the bar graph above shows, EcoAnalytics polling in September (n=1,000) found only a limited increase awareness of the need for immediate climate action. Another question found roughly similar agreement about the need for prioritizing the social good.

Of course, the meaning of these data is not entirely clear (did people already convinced of the need to act fall into this "woke" one-third?); but it would be wise not to overestimate the degree to which Canadians are making connections.

Other research, however, echoes our findings and indicates Canadians want bold action now. See, for example, [Broadbent Institute survey](#) of Sept. 15.

**Notes:**  
1. The preparedness frame is not a simple one, so test it first with decision-makers, and other influencers.  
2. When discussing recovery, remember to be sensitive to Canadians economic concerns (and see Tip 3)

### Tip 3: Avoid trade-offs: connect environmental protection to economic prosperity

Don't characterize the environment and economy as mutually exclusive — talk about transformative action on biodiversity or climate change in ways that address economic concerns and vice-versa.

When forced to choose between economic recovery or jobs and environmental protection, Canadians often tend to choose the former. However, there is strong support for green policies when the two issues are integrated. [Environics research](#) for Greenpeace, released in October, found that 68% of respondents prioritize federal investments in renewable energy over fossil fuels. Similarly, Environics found that 87% believe it's important to prioritize jobs related to protecting nature and the environment. On the other hand, when protecting the environment and the economy are presented as two separate options, jobs and economic performance will take precedence even when there is concern for the environment (which many participants in focus groups had). When communicating about a green recovery it is key, therefore, to frame *green and just* as the means, not the alternative.

**Note:**  
1. Target your message for best effect — there's even greater support for prioritizing investments in renewable energy among youth (80%) and households making less than \$40,000 (78%). This is similarly the case for folks in Ontario (71%), Atlantic Canada (77%), and Quebec (77%) (compared to 56% in Alberta).

### Tip 4: Tax the rich



76% support a new wealth tax on the richest, and 73% support a tax on corporations that have made large profits during the pandemic. (Photo: Arturo Castaneya, Unsplash)

To address the argument that shifting to a green economy is too expensive, tackling both inequality and climate change could be the answer.

There is support for redistributive policies that can be leveraged to tackle both concerns about inequality and financing a green recovery from COVID. The [Broadbent Institute report](#) released in September found that 82% of respondents believe that "the wealth of Canada's richest people is better off or has not been impacted by the pandemic while most think the economic and social well-being of youth, racialized Canadians, and women have been negatively impacted."

Not only do Canadians agree that the pandemic has highlighted inequalities, they have an appetite to address those inequalities. The Broadbent report also found that "76% support a new wealth tax on the richest, and 73% support a tax on corporations who have made large profits during the pandemic." This is consistent with the report commissioned by Greenpeace, mentioned in previous tip, which found that there is support for financing the recovery by taxing polluters and the wealthiest Canadians.

### Tip 5: Frame possibility: use experience of pandemic to open minds

Decades of inaction by governments, industry and neighbours have convinced too many of us that nothing can be done to tackle the existential threats of climate change, environmental degradation and their impacts. Then COVID struck, and within days, governments at all levels were showing leadership, resulting in profound changes: millions working from home and washing their hands frequently, cleaner air, less noise, more birdsong.

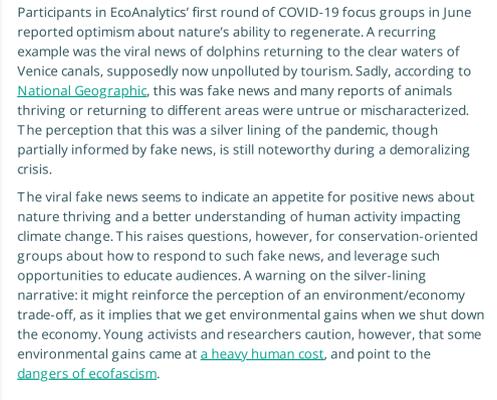
Little wonder that COVID has boosted Canadians' sense of efficacy (ability to effect change) a precursor of engagement. Try leveraging this for the sake of the environment.

How? As Environics concluded in its report on the latest round of EcoAnalytics focus groups and polling, test narrative frames that build on our heightened awareness of what is possible. For example:

- Change is possible: We adapted fast to the demands of lockdown – look at what we have achieved! Some of us even rediscovered past pleasures: e.g. brothers and sisters bubbling (and forced to past along); time saved not commuting spent binge-watching Schitt's Creek, etc.
- Change makes a difference: Show evidence of success: flattening the curve, providing for working people to stay safe, better air quality, lives saved, etc.
- Change is worthwhile: Build on people's hopes for the world post-COVID, encapsulated in words offered by participants of EcoAnalytics focus groups in September: balanced, focused, polite, health, adaptation, team, solidarity, prepared.

In these frames, remember to be clear about what you ask of Canadians. The public health instructions to protect against COVID (wash hands, wear a mask, stay 2m apart), will not always consistently communicated, are straightforward. What is it you want Canadians to do to combat climate change?

## Venetian dolphins: is fake news good?



Dolphins didn't really return to Venice. (Photo: Tania Miron via Unsplash)

Participants in EcoAnalytics' first round of COVID-19 focus groups in June reported optimism about nature's ability to regenerate. A recurring example was the viral news of dolphins returning to the clear waters of Venice canals, supposedly now unpolluted by tourism. Sadly, according to [National Geographic](#), this was fake news and many reports of animals thriving or returning to different areas were untrue or mischaracterized. The perception that this was a silver lining of the pandemic, though partially informed by fake news, is still noteworthy during a demoralizing crisis.

The viral fake news seems to indicate an appetite for positive news about nature thriving and a better understanding of human activity impacting climate change. This raises questions, however, for conservation-oriented groups about how to respond to such fake news, and leverage such opportunities to educate audiences. A warning on the silver-lining narrative: it might reinforce the perception of an environment/economy trade-off, as it implies that we get environmental gains when we shut down the economy. Young activists and researchers caution, however, that some environmental gains came at [a heavy human cost](#), and point to the [dangers of ecofascism](#).

## Research notes: Nanos, Ipsos, Climate Outreachs...

COVID has sent researchers and pollsters into overdrive. Many have shown that worries about the pandemic and its effects on health care, jobs and the economy eclipsed concerns about climate change and the environment, early on. This month, however, [unprompted issues tracking by Nanos](#), suggests that concerns about the environment have been on the comeback for months.

An [Environics poll](#) released by Greenpeace, Nov. 2, indicates that 68% of Canadians want the federal government's recovery agenda to prioritize investments in renewable energy, not fossil fuels. This includes 56% of Albertans, and no less than 78% of Canadians in households making less than \$40,000 per year.

The results of a special survey of nearly 600 businesses of all sizes across different sectors in the United Kingdom by [Ipsos/MORI](#), published Nov. 2, points to a permanent shift away from office work, and firms planning to use COVID to reduce carbon emissions and "build back better."

A useful resource is "[Britain Talks Climate: A Toolkit for engaging the British public on climate change](#)," released by Climate Outreach, Nov. 18. The evidence-based guidance argues that there is no culture war over climate change in the U.K. and there are seven distinct segments based on people's core beliefs, each requiring different approaches.

## EcoA News

- **Climate of Change Survey data analysis:** In a webinar for Members and Subscribers, Nov. 23, Research Partner Erick Lachapelle summarized first results of this national survey, conducted over 14 days beginning Oct. 23, with a sample of 1,000. Erick asks that Members and Subscribers let him know by the end of November about topics that they would like him to analyze in greater depth — and report on in a special briefing in January.
- **Omnibus poll last call:** Please also let us know by Dec. 1 if you have questions you would like to test in Environics next national omnibus poll. This second round of COVID-related polling — the first was conducted in early Sept. — was postponed so that we could draw on the first results of the Climate of Change Survey, now available.
- **Translation:** Project Manager Emilia Patiño Anaya has had a busy first six weeks, reading EcoAnalytics reports, developing a theory of change and drafting a work-plan. This includes the development of an index and keywords so that Members will be able access key information and data in EcoAnalytics growing body of research.



- **Mad Hatters:** Evaluations of EcoAnalytics Research-a-Palooza, Oct. 14-15, were good, though the event got off to a shaky start, as shown above, when participants arrived, deranged by months of COVID lock-down. This included a representative of Environmental Defence in a frightening mask, a Project Director in a latex swimming cap and DSFs representative on the Steering Supervisory Committee in headgear favoured by New Brunswick big-game hunters.

[Whaddya think? 60-sec evaluation](#)

