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Water the new oil, researchers say

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Water is set to be "the new oil", according to a new book based on Australian consumer research.

Drinking water will soon become a luxury item rather than a free commodity for Australians and come to dominate advertising imagery, say the book's authors Ross Honeywill and Verity Blyth.

The consumer behaviour experts, who spent five years surveying more than half a million Australians, said they had discovered that deep underlying concerns about personal wellbeing, water scarcity and global warming were behind the change.

They point to the rise-and-rise of bottled water in particular as an example of the new trend.

Buying bottled water is considered to be a prime example of "discretionary spending", or spending that goes beyond satisfying our basic needs, they said.

"In Australia almost 600 million litres of water a year are packaged and sold under more than 1,000 water brands to thirsty Australians by beverage giants such as Coca-Cola Amatil and Schweppes amongst others," Mr Honeywill says.

"Water is one of the first global victims of climate change.

"We are likely to see water as a new theme in everything from new travel experiences that celebrate fresh, clear, pure water to the domestic harvesting of rainwater.

"In consumer trend terms, what this represents is a shift to concern for wellbeing - a thirst for purity, the organic and the unprocessed."

The book, *NEO Power*, identifies a dominant new breed of affluent and well-educated Australian consumer, christened the "NEO", that the authors say is behind the biggest changes in the nation's social and political landscape.