



Australian Government



Inspector-  
General of  
Water  
Compliance

# Murray–Darling Basin community perceptions research 2022

## Knowledge of Murray–Darling Basin and Water Management

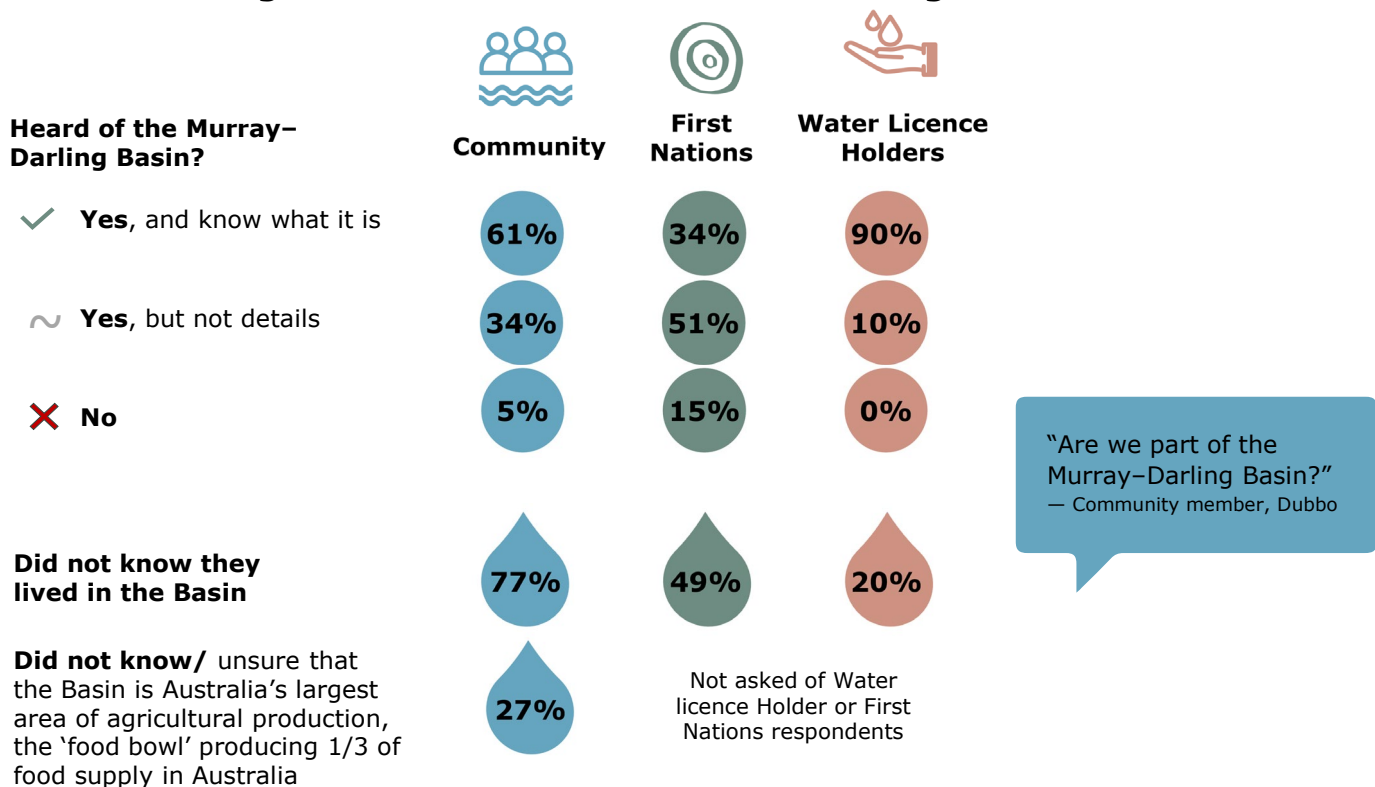


# Foundational Basin knowledge



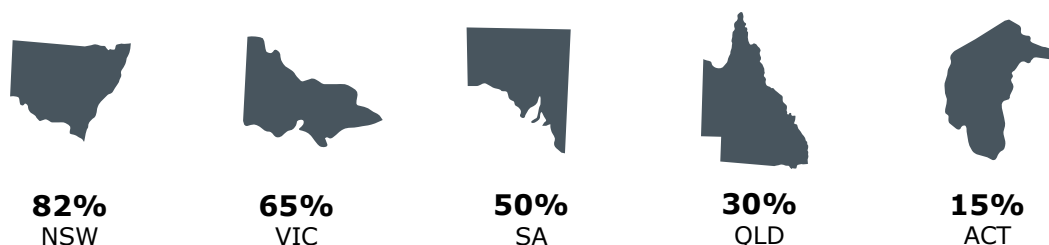
Overall, foundational knowledge about the Basin was limited and/or ad-hoc. Awareness tended to be superficial, particularly among community respondents (with a significant number either not aware of the Basin, or of details about it). Likewise, the majority of Basin community members were not aware they lived in the Basin which directly reduced relevance of the topic for them.

## Overall findings about foundational Basin knowledge



## Knowledge of which areas the Basin covers

(% who identified a State/ Territory as being in the Basin, amongst community respondents who had heard of the Basin)



**Only 6%** of respondents who had heard of the Basin correctly identified **all Basin States and Territory** (with the ACT the least well known, despite being the most densely populated area).

Q14. Have you heard of the Murray-Darling Basin? Q15. And do you live in the Murray-Darling Basin? Q20. Please indicate whether you think each statement is true or false... Base: Community (n=817), First Nations (n=56), WLH (n=200)  
Q16. Based on what you know, which of the following States and Territories is the Basin in? Base: Have heard of the Basin - Community (n=780)

# Foundational Basin knowledge



The research explored particular knowledge areas among participants, finding substantial gaps in understanding even among more engaged participants. These gaps in knowledge were found to drive negative emotions, attitudes and perceptions of water management in the Basin and/or cause confusion – with the rationale for decisions made in relation to water management often unclear or misunderstood.

## Greater awareness



That the Murray–Darling Basin:

- Provided economic benefits (e.g. jobs, tourism, exports).
- Provided social benefits (e.g. keeping regional towns “alive”, recreational and aesthetic use as well as lifestyle benefits).
- Provided environmental benefits (e.g. biodiversity, healthy river system, fauna and flora).



That scarcity of water and the health of the rivers were ongoing concerns.



That governments were involved in decisions about water.

“I know it’s managed and I assume it would be a combination of local and state governments, Federal would be involved as well... but I don’t know how it’s managed.”

– Community member, Toowoomba

## Less awareness



Of the size, scale, locational coverage and significance of the Murray–Darling Basin (e.g. extent of agricultural production).



The water management systems, operations and processes – including the extent to which the water in the Basin was managed and regulated.



Details about the water flow and type (e.g. surface and underground).



The Murray–Darling Basin Plan – including environmental and cultural flows, buy-backs, and how the Plan operates to measure, account for and share water in the system.



Delineation of roles and responsibilities between Federal, State/ Territory and other water management authorities.



The rationale and details of the water market – benefits of the water markets (such as positive impacts on water use behaviours), reasons for implementation and how it worked.



Difference between water allocations and entitlements – including different licence types (lower awareness was particularly evident among community member participants).



Compliance requirements – extent of restrictions, licencing requirements, metering and where to find information about this.



Enforcement – including the extent of monitoring and penalties applied.

# Knowledge of water management



There tended to be more correct than incorrect understanding of water management. However, some community members lacked confidence in their knowledge, whereas water licence holders were slightly more confident. Knowledge was more limited in relation to water markets, and the roles of Basin states and water allocation – this was across the entire Basin.

## Knowledge relating to water management



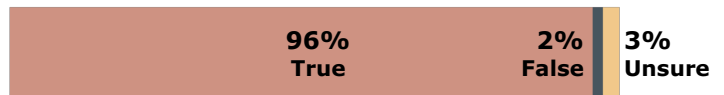
Community



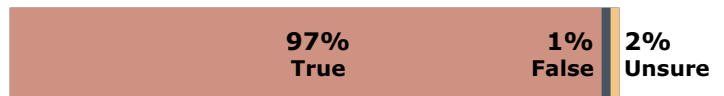
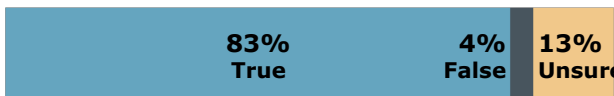
Water Licence Holders



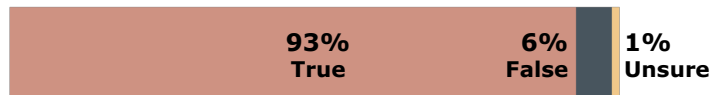
You need to have a licence to use water for irrigation or other commercial purposes within the Murray–Darling Basin



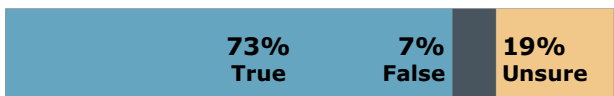
People who do not comply with water rules and regulations in the Basin can be fined or face charges



Irrigators and commercial users of water in the Basin are restricted in how much water they can use, depending on their licence and the amount of water available



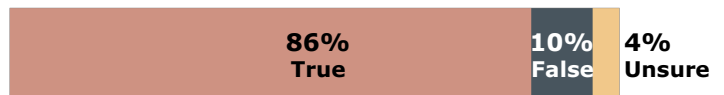
Water in the Basin is allocated based on use for domestic, commercial, agricultural and environmental purposes



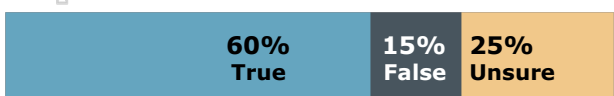
*Not asked of Water licence Holder respondents*



Each State and Territory government is responsible for regulating and enforcing the use of water in their part of the Basin



Water in the Basin can be traded through the water market. That is, it can be bought and sold commercially



*Not asked of Water licence Holder respondents*

True False Unsure

Q20. For each statement, please indicate whether you think it is true or false. Base: Community (n=817), WLH (n=200). WLH respondents were only asked a selection of the statements, and First Nations respondents were not asked these specific knowledge components.



## Sources of information

The research identified **a range of sources that informed participants' knowledge** in relation to the Murray–Darling Basin and water management. Most participants reported that the information they received tended to come from word-of-mouth in the community, or through media channels. Many also reported that the information through these channels was more likely to be negatively skewed, with a tendency for these sources to prioritise negative over positive stories and content.

The following sources of information about the Basin were identified amongst qualitative research participants:



**Word of mouth** – among community members as well as among other irrigators/ water licence holders. Participants noted that these discussions increase during times of drought/ when water is scarce.



**On-the-ground experiences/ interactions with waterways** – such as through recreational activities (e.g. fishing, boating, hunting, camping) or work (for irrigators or commercial users).



**News/ media** – via newspapers, online, podcasts and/ or TV (including current affairs programs such as 'Landline' and '4Corners').



**Education facilities** – e.g. schools, universities.



**Workplace or interest groups** – e.g. for those working or volunteering in a sector related to water/ waterways.



**Government channels** – e.g. websites, phone contacts or direct mail. However, government channels were only being used by a few participants who were more engaged/ had a direct need for specific information.

Currently, there tends to be a range of channels and sources setting the agenda in relation to discussions and information on water management – **with government sources and channels only considered by a few and infrequently**. This means that misinformation is not being proactively corrected, and the ability for government to communicate is hindered if community does not use these sources for information