Murray–Darling Basin community perceptions research 2023

Understanding the Audience

**Different audience groups**

Awareness, attitudes, perceptions and behaviours in relation to the topic of water management in the Basin (including compliance and enforcement) differed by audience groups depending on the levels of engagement they had with waterways in their local area – including what they used waterways for and how frequently.

**Segmenting audiences across the Basin**

**The 2022 research identified some key audience groups among people in the Murray—Darling Basin**\* (as listed below, with detailed summaries on the following pages). These groups form a useful basis for better understanding the perspectives of the people in the Basin, including their needs and preferences, so as to reach, engage and tailor information and/ or other activities. Throughout the reporting, specific data and findings have been presented where findings differ by these groups and these differences have been considered relevant/ useful.

Audiences are arranged from high to low for the level of interest and engagement with waterways and water management in the Basin. Water licence holders are at the top with the highest interest and engagement, followed by community advocates, active users, and community bystanders, who have the lowest levels of interest and engagement.

**Water licence holders (WLHs) (8% of Basin residents aged 18+)**

Water management is essential to their livelihoods, meaning they are highly engaged and interested in the topic.

**Community advocates (13% of Basin residents aged 18+)**

Engaged in waterway management issues, due to their interest in water and the environment and/ or work in relevant fields.

**Active users (38% of Basin residents aged 18+)**

Community members who live near and/ or regularly use waterways in the Basin (such as for recreational purposes).

**Community bystanders (42% of Basin residents aged 18+)**

Limited use of waterways and limited interest in water management issues.

80% of audiences in the active users and community bystanders’ categories are relatively less engaged with water management issues.

\*In the 2022 research, First Nations Peoples were identified as a key group. Due to the smaller scale of the 2023 research, this cohort was not systematically sampled, and thus have not been reported on separately for this research.

Note: Questions were asked in the survey to identify each group and their size.

# Water licence holders

Water licence holders are highly interested in water management issues due to the impact it has on their livelihoods. Compliance and enforcement issues are therefore important for them.

A participant quote reads: Water is precious, and everyone needs it… regulations mean we can operate with certainty. This quote is attributed to a commercial user of waterways in Dubbo.

## Demographics

### Type of water user

In farming, 40% use water for non-dairy livestock, 34% for permanent crops, 33% for annual or seasonal crops, and 4% for dairy. 2% use water for tourism, and 8% use water for other purposes.

Below, a Venn diagram for the use of ground water and surface water is shown, with call out boxes at the bottom for the top two types of surface water use. 35% use ground water, 45% use surface water, and 20% use both ground and surface water. Top types for surface water use are general security, 53%, and high security, 38%.

### Where they live

42% lived in Victoria, 8% in Queensland, 36% in New South Wales, and 15% in South Australia.

### Defining characteristics

100% of water licence holders either hold or manage a water licence or purchase water for large-scale commercial purposes.

### Heard of the Basin?

2023 and 2022 comparisons for the proportion of water licence holders who have heard of the Murray–Darling Basin:

* 91% of water licence holders in 2023 responded 'yes, and know what it is,' compared to 89% in 2022.
* 9% responded 'yes, but not the details,' compared to 11% in 2022.
* 1% in 2023 responded 'no' when asked if they had heard of the Basin, compared to less than 1% in 2022.

### Top perceptions: Water licence holders tended to agree that…

* 85% agreed that it is important to know that water coming out of the Basin is measured.
* 80% agreed that the whole community benefits when the water regulations are followed.
* 80% agreed that people should be punished for not following water regulations.
* 79% agreed that having effective enforcement of water regulations is important for maintaining healthy waterways.

### IGWC

Awareness KPI, Confidence and Trust KPI, and Performance KPI scores of water licence holders for 2022 and 2023. Index scores are out of a potential range of 0 to 100.

* For Awareness, the KPI score was 41 in 2023, compared to a score of 36 in 2022.
* For Confidence and Trust, the KPI score was KPI score of 47 in 2023, compared to a score of 45 in 2022.
* For Performance, the KPI score was 44 in 2023, compared to 40 in 2022. An upward arrow can be seen beside the KPI score for 2023, indicating a statistically significant increase compared to the previous year at a 90% confidence level.

50% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted to know more about water rules, regulations and enforcement in the Basin.

72% gave a positive response, rating 8 to 10 out of 10, for the importance of compliance and enforcement.

Base: Water licence holders, ranges from n=115 to 214.

# Community Advocates

Community advocates are members of local Basin communities who are passionate and interested in water issues, including compliance with and enforcement of water rules and regulations.

A participant quote reads: If there’s no water there’s no food bowl…everyone relies on it. Water management ensures the waterways are looked after for everyone. This quote is attributed to a community member aged above 40 years in Shepparton.

## Demographics

### Gender

59% of community advocates were male and 40% were female.

### Age

46% of community advocates were between 18 to 34 years of age, 26% were between 35 to 54 years of age, and 28% were 55 years or older.

### Where they live

41% lived in New South Wales, 29% lived in Victoria, 16% lived in the Australian Capital Territory, 8% lived in Queensland, and 6% lived in South Australia.

23% lived in the Northern Basin while 77% lived in the Southern Basin.

56% lived in a metropolitan area, a regional centre or a large rural town, while 44% lived in a smaller rural town or remote community.

### Defining characteristics

67% of community advocates were passionate about water management decisions and 16% were part of a local water or waterways group.

### Heard of the Basin?

2023 and 2022 comparisons for the proportion of community advocates who have heard of the Murray–Darling Basin:

* 67% of community advocates in 2023 responded 'yes, and know what it is,' compared to 68% in 2022.
* 23% responded 'yes, but not the details,' compared to 31% in 2022.
* 9% of community advocates in 2023 responded 'no' when asked if they had heard of the Basin, compared to 1% in 2022. An upward arrow can also be seen beside the figure for 2023, indicating a statistically significant increase compared to the previous year at a 90% confidence level.

### Top perceptions: Community advocates tend to agree that…

* 80% agreed that having effective enforcement of water regulations is important for maintaining healthy waterways.
* 80% agreed that the whole community benefits when the water regulations are followed.
* 78% agreed that people should be punished for not following water regulations.
* 77% agreed that it is important to have an independent federal government body overseeing water regulations.

### IGWC

Awareness KPI, Confidence and Trust KPI, and Performance KPI scores of community advocates for 2022 and 2023. Index scores are out of a potential range of 0 to 100.

* For Awareness, the KPI score was 29 in 2023, compared to a score of 23 in 2022.
* For Confidence and Trust, the KPI score was 47 in 2023, compared to a score of 43 in 2022.
* For Performance, the KPI score was 44 in 2023, compared to 38 in 2022.

64% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they want to know more about water rules, regulations and enforcement in the Basin.

63% gave a positive response, rating 8 to 10 out of 10, on the importance of compliance and enforcement.

Base: Community advocates (n=105)

# Active users

Active users engage with waterways for recreational purposes and/ or live close by. Being on the water regularly means they are engaged with their local catchments, but most do not think of this as being part of the Basin system, and their interest in water management in the Basin is thus limited.

A participant quote reads: I went for a swim in the river not long ago and there was a fair bit of flow coming down compared to a week ago… When the river drops it’s always a big conversation. This quote is attributed to a community member, engaged user, in Murray Bridge.

## Demographics

### Gender

44% of active users were male, while 56% were female.

### Age

31% of active users were between 18 to 34 years of age, 33% were between 35 to 54 years, and 36% were 55 years or older.

### Where they live

36% lived in New South Wales, 37% lived in Victoria, 13% lived in the Australian Capital Territory, 7% lived in Queensland, and 7% lived in South Australia.

19% lived in the Northern Basin while 81% lived in the Southern Basin.

60% lived in a metropolitan area, a regional centre or a large rural town, while 40% lived in a smaller rural town or remote community.

### Defining characteristics

96% of active users use waterways at least a few times a year and 18% live in riparian areas.

### Heard of the Basin?

2023 and 2022 comparisons for the proportion of active users who have heard of the Murray–Darling Basin.

* 63% of active users in 2023 responded 'yes, and know what it is,' compared to 66% in 2022.
* 34% responded 'yes, but not the details,' compared to 30% in 2022.
* 3% of active users in 2023 responded 'no' when asked if they had heard of the Basin, compared to 4% in 2022.

### Top perceptions: Active users tend to agree that…

* 80% agreed that having effective enforcement of water regulations is important for maintaining healthy waterways.
* 74% agreed that the whole community benefits when the water regulations are followed.
* 73% agreed that it is important to have an independent federal government body overseeing water regulations.
* 73% agreed that people should be punished for not following water regulations.

### IGWC

Awareness KPI, Confidence and Trust KPI, and Performance KPI scores of active users for 2022 and 2023. Index scores are out of a potential range of 0 to 100.

* For Awareness, the KPI score was 17 in 2023, compared to a score of 15 in 2022.
* For Confidence and Trust, the KPI score was 42 in 2023, compared to a score of 37 in 2022. An upward arrow can be seen beside the figure for the Confidence and Trust KPI in 2023, indicating a statistically significant increase from the previous year at a 90% confidence level.
* For Performance, the KPI score was 38 in 2023, compared to 33 in 2022. An upward arrow can be seen beside the figure for the Performance KPI in 2023, indicating a statistically significant increase from the previous year at a 90% confidence level.

47% of active users either agreed or strongly agreed that they would want to know more about water rules, regulations and enforcement in the Basin.

50% gave a positive response, rating 8 to 10 out of 10, on the importance of compliance and enforcement.

Base: Active users, and included n=327 respondents.

# Community bystanders

Community bystanders are the largest of the groups. They live in Basin communities, but have very limited engagement with waterways. As such, their knowledge of, and interest in, water management in the Basin is low.

A participant quote reads: I know we’re situated on the river but I don’t think about the Murray—Darling Basin or water management as such. This quote is attributed to a community member aged 18 to 39 years in Murray Bridge.

## Demographics

### Gender

50% of community bystanders were male and 50% were female.

### Age

17% of community bystanders were between 18 to 34 years of age, 32% were between 35 to 54 years, and 51% were 55 years or older.

### Where they live

37% lived in New South Wales, 21% lived in Victoria, 24% lived in the Australian Capital Territory, 14% lived in Queensland, and 4% lived in South Australia.

33% lived in the Northern Basin while 67% lived in the Southern Basin.

65% lived in a metropolitan area, a regional centre or a large rural town, while 35% lived in a smaller rural town or remote community.

### Defining characteristics

100% of community bystanders use waterways once a year or less.

### Heard of the Basin?

2023 and 2022 comparisons for the proportion of community bystanders who have heard of the Murray–Darling Basin.

* 55% of community bystanders in 2023 responded 'yes, and know what it is,' compared to 55% in 2022.
* 39% responded 'yes, but not the details,' compared to 38% in 2022.
* 6% of community bystanders in 2023 responded 'no' when asked if they had heard of the Basin, compared to 7% in 2022.

### Top perceptions: Community bystanders tend to agree that…

* 77% agreed that having effective enforcement of water regulations is important for maintaining healthy waterways.
* 69% agreed that people should be punished for not following water regulations.
* 67% agreed that it is important to have an independent federal government body overseeing water regulations.
* 67% agree that the whole community benefits when the water regulations are followed.

### IGWC

Awareness KPI, Confidence and Trust KPI, and Performance KPI scores of community bystanders for 2022 and 2023. Index scores are out of a potential range of 0 to 100.

* For Awareness, the KPI score was 10 in 2023, compared to a score of 12 in 2022.
* For Confidence and Trust, the KPI score was 34 in 2023, compared to a score of 34 in 2022.
* For Performance, the KPI score was 29 in 2023, compared to 28 in 2022.

32% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they want to know more about water rules, regulations and enforcement in the Basin.

42% gave a positive response, rating 8 to 10 out of 10, on the importance of compliance and enforcement.

Base: Community bystanders (n=368 respondents).