Murray–Darling Basin community perceptions research 2023

Perceptions relating to water management in the Murray–Darling Basin

**Perceptions of water management**

While perceptions of water management among community respondents have improved slightly from the previous research, water licence holder respondents were significantly less likely to provide a positive rating. Across both audiences, negative perceptions were more commonly reported than positive.

**Feelings towards the management of water in the Basin…**

For community members, 18% provided a negative response, 71% gave a neutral or unsure response, and 11% gave a positive response; compared to 26% who provided a negative response, 68% gave a neutral or unsure response, and 6% who gave a positive response in 2022. A downward arrow can be seen beside the 2023 figure for the proportion of negative responses and an upward arrow beside the proportion of positive responses, indicating a statistically significant decrease in negative responses and a significant increase in positive responses compared to the previous year, at a 90% confidence level.

For water licence holders, 26% gave a negative response, 64% gave a neutral or unsure response, and 9% gave a positive response; compared to 25% who gave a negative response, 58% gave a neutral or unsure response, and 17% gave a positive response in 2022. A downward arrow can be seen beside the 2023 proportion of positive responses, indicating a statistically significant decrease in the proportion of positive responses compared to the previous year, at a 90% confidence level.

Questions and data used for the charts above:

* Q17. On a scale from 1 to 10, where ‘1’ is extremely negative, and ‘10’ is extremely positive, based on what you know, how would you rate your feelings about the management of water in the Basin…? Negative = 1-3, Neutral = 4-7, Positive = 8-10.
* The community base size in 2023 was n=800; and in 2022 it was n=817. The water licence base size in 2023 was n=214; and in 2022 it was n=200.

**Key perceptions of water management identified in the qualitative research**

As found previously, perceptions of water management were influenced by what participants saw and heard…

#### Key positive perceptions identified in 2023 research included:

* More water in the system currently – which reduced skepticism and concerns about management of water;
* A greater focus on water efficiency in agricultural and irrigation decisions and practices, such as drip irrigation, more efficient crops, planting decisions and crop variation; and
* Environmental flows having improved biodiversity, such as flora and fauna, and water quality.

#### Key negative perceptions identified in 2023 research included:

* Foreign ownership of water and using Australia’s water to grow products for export, such as cotton, which was disadvantaging Australian growers and community;
* Environmental flows destroying the environment, for example, erosion of banks, flow fluctuations, the Barmah Choke;
* Water not being shared fairly and inconsistencies in rules and regulations between States/ Territory;
* Not enough action taken to prepare communities and businesses for weather events such as drought, flooding; and
* Political motives driving water management decisions.