Murray–Darling Basin community perceptions research 2023

Findings relating to compliance and enforcement

# Community concerns relating to the Basin

Respondents’ key concerns in relation to the Basin have remained largely consistent with the previous research and include: **distribution and allocation of water** across the Basin; **sustainability of the system** for the future; and **quality of water**, including pollution.

A participant quote reads: If water isn't managed properly then we have disasters like the 2010-2011 floods, which were horrific. This quote is attributed to a less engaged community member living in Queensland.

### Top-of-mind concerns relating to the Murray–Darling Basin

Unprompted responses from community members

* 35% were concerned with the distribution or allocation of water across different uses, compared to 36% in 2022.
* 26% were concerned with sustainability of water take, water supply or water levels, compared to 26% in 2022.
* 23% were concerned with pollution and poor water quality, compared to 26% in 2022.
* 19% were concerned with poor water management or about mismanagement, compared to 21% in 2022.
* 19% made general comments about the environment, compared to 17% in 2022.
* 18% were concerned about the impact on flora and fauna, or about invasive species, compared to 16% in 2022.
* 17% were concerned about drought, floods and/or climate change, compared to 16% in 2022.
* 13% were concerned about the way water is used in agriculture, compared to 13% in 2022.
* 11% were concerned about issues with river flow, compared to 12% in 2022.
* 6% were concerned about water markets, including buy backs and water rights. This was a new code added in 2023, thus there is no comparison with the previous year.
* 6% were concerned about issues to do with compliance and enforcement, compared to 5% in 2022.
  1. Consistent with the previous research, compliance and enforcement were a smaller concern among water management issues across the Basin more broadly, with only 6% of community respondents considering these to be a key concern.
  2. However, the qualitative research indicated that compliance and enforcement tended to become a more critical issue and had higher priority during drier periods.
* 3% were concerned about the cost of water, compared to 4% in 2022.
* 10% had 'other' top-of-mind concerns, compared to 11% in 2022.
* 12% responded 'don't know', compared to 9% in 2022, and 6% had no top-of-mind concerns, compared to 4% in 2022.

Questions and data used for the charts above:

* Q19. Based on what you know, what three issues are you most concerned about in relation to the Murray–Darling Basin?
* The community base size in 2023 was n=800, and in 2022 it was n=817.

# Importance of compliance and enforcement

Consistent with the previous research, strong compliance and enforcement was felt to be important to ensure the effectiveness of water management efforts across the Basin – though this has reduced since 2022. The benefits it affords remained the same, and most agreed that the whole community benefited when rules and regulations were followed.

There has also been strong agreement over both rounds of the research that it was important to have an independent federal body overseeing water rules and regulations across the Basin.

The importance of compliance and enforcement of water rules and regulations for Basin community reduced for both Basin community and water licence holder respondents in 2023…

### Importance of compliance and enforcement of water rules and regulations in the Murray–Darling Basin for the Basin community (when prompted)

Percentage of respondents who rated 8 to 10 out of 10

* For community respondents, 67% gave rating of 8 to 10 out of 10 regarding the importance of compliance and enforcement in the Murray–Darling Basin, compared to 77% in 2022.
* For water licence holders, 74% gave a rating of 8 to 10 out of 10 for this sentiment, compared to 83% in 2022. The 2023 results of both community and water licence holders indicate a statistically significant decrease compared to the previous year, at a 90% confidence level.

Question and data used for the chart above:

* Q26. How important is compliance and enforcement of water rules and regulations in the Murray–Darling Basin for people who live in the Basin.
* The community base size in 2023 was n=800, and in 2022 it was n=817. The water licence holder base size in 2023 was n=214, and in 2022 it was n=200.

The qualitative research found this reduction in sentiment was **likely due to the amount of water currently in the system**, which tended to make compliance and enforcement a lower priority at this point in time.

#### 'It is **important to have an independent federal body overseeing water rules and regulations**' (% agree)

* 71% of community respondents and 70% of water licence holders agreed or strongly agreed.

#### 'The **whole community benefits when water rules and regulations are followed**' (% agree)

* 72% of community respondents and 80% of water licence holders agreed or strongly agreed.

Questions and data used in the chart above:

* Q27. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about water rules and regulations in the Murray–Darling Basin.
* The community base size in 2023 was n=800, and the water licence holder base size in 2023 was n=214.

The qualitative research was consistent with the 2022 results in confirming the **benefits of strong compliance and enforcement** as being the following:

* To **ensure consistency in water regulations**, which was felt to be key to effective management and collaboration across the system.
* To **enable fairness and equity** in water use or water take, which alleviated negative perceptions, or polarisation of views.
* To ensure **the sustainability of the system**, which was essential for the sustenance of the system and survival of Basin communities.

# Perceptions and attitudes towards compliance

The perception that it is easy to comply with water rules and regulations – and that **farmers and commercial water users always complied** with them – increased among community members in 2023. However, the proportion of **water licence holders indicating that they were ‘very likely’ to comply with the water rules and regulations reduced** from 84% to 74%.

### Perceptions of and attitudes to compliance

(% agree)

* 61% of community members and 71% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed with the statement 'I get upset with people who don't follow water rules and regulations,' compared to 64% of community members and 72% of water licence holders in 2022.
* 45% of community members and 41% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed with the statement 'People often take more water than they are allowed to from the Basin,' compared to 48% of community members and 45% of water licence holders in 2022.
* 34% of community members and 58% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed with the statement 'It's easy to comply with the water rules and regulations,' compared to 25% of community members and 59% of water licence holders in 2022. The 2023 result for community respondents indicates a statistically significant increase compared to the previous year, at a 90% confidence level.
* 20% of community members and 45% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed with the statement 'Farmers and commercial water users always comply with water rules and regulations,' compared to 13% of community members and 36% of water licence holders in 2022. The 2023 result for community respondents indicates a statistically significant increase compared to the previous year, at a 90% confidence level.

**Intention to comply among Water Licence Holders has reduced since 2022**, with this audience being less likely to report that they were ‘very likely’ to comply with the water rules and regulations.

* 74% of water licence holder respondents 'very likely' to comply in 2023 compared to 84% in 2022. The 2023 figure indicates a statistically significant decrease compared to the previous year, at a 90% confidence level.

Questions and data used for charts on this slide:

* Q27. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about water rules and regulations in the Murray–Darling Basin.
* Q28. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Murray–Darling Basin.
* The community base size in 2022 was n=817,and in 2023 it was n=800. The water licence holder base size in 2022 was n=200, and in 2023 it was n=214.
* Q32. How likely are you to…? The water licence holder base size in 2022 was n=200, and in 2023 it was n=214.

# Monitoring and enforcement

Positively, more community members believed that **rules and regulations were consistently enforced,** and that water was being monitored effectively across the Basin, compared with the 2022 results (important aspects of the IGWC’s role). They were also more likely to feel that **penalties for water theft in the Basin were appropriate**. However, awareness of water users being punished dropped among water licence holders.

### Perceptions of, and attitudes to, monitoring

(% agree)

* 58% of community respondents and 85% of water licence holders in 2023 agree that it was important for them to know that water coming out of the Basin is measured, compared to 61% of community respondents and 88% of water licence holders in 2022.
* 21% of community respondents and 40% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed that water use in the Basin is monitored effectively, compared to 15% of community respondents and 38% of water licence holders in 2022. The 2023 figure for community respondents indicates a statistically significant increase compared to the previous year, at a 90% confidence level.

Questions and data used for the charts above:

* Q27. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about water rules and regulations in the Murray–Darling Basin.
* Q28. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Murray–Darling Basin.
* The community base size in 2022 was n=817, and in 2023 it was n=800. The water licence holder base size in 2022 was n=200, and in 2023 it was n=214.

### Perceptions of, and attitudes to, enforcement

There was strong support among both community member and water licence holder participants for the enforcement of rules and regulations, with the view that this was important for the health of waterways.

(% agree)

* 79% of community respondents and 79% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed that effective enforcement of water rules and regulations is important for maintaining healthy waterways in the Basin, compared to 77% of community respondents and 83% of water licence holders in 2022.
* 72% of community respondents and 80% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed that people should be punished for not following water rules and regulations, compared to 74% of community respondents and 87% of water licence holders in 2022.
* 67% of community respondents and 74% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed that knowing that water rules and regulations are being enforced would reassure them, compared to 67% of community respondents and 78% of water licence holders in 2022.
* 25% of community respondents and 56% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed that they were aware of water users being punished for not complying with water rules, compared to 26% of community respondents and 66% of water licence holders in 2022. The 2023 figure for water licence holders indicates a statistically significant decrease compared to the previous year, at a 90% confidence level.
* 30% of community respondents and 45% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed that the penalties for water theft in the Basin are appropriate, compared to 21% of community respondents and 50% of water licence holders in 2022. The 2023 figure for community respondents indicates a statistically significant increase compared to the previous year, at a 90% confidence level.
* 21% of community respondents and 22% of water licence holders in 2023 agreed that Enforcement of water rules and regulations is consistent across the different States and Territory in the Basin, compared to 15% of community respondents and 21% of water licence holders in 2022. The 2023 figure for community respondents indicates a statistically significant increase compared to the previous year, at a 90% confidence level.

Questions and data used for the charts above:

* Q27. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about water rules and regulations in the Murray–Darling Basin.
* Q28. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Murray–Darling Basin.
* The community base size in 2023 was n=800, and in 2022 it was n=817. The water licence holder base size in 2023 was n=214, and in 2022 it was n=200.