



Australian Government



Inspector-
General of
Water
Compliance

Murray–Darling Basin community perceptions research 2024–25

Project overview and research
methodology



Research overview and methodology

The primary objective for the research was **to track changes in community sentiment over time**, as well as **measure performance against the Inspector-General's community sentiment key performance indicators (KPIs)** – including trust and confidence.

Project overview



Quantitative research methodology

1,068 people were surveyed across the Murray–Darling Basin between 31 October – 9 December 2024. Questions were tailored to each audience to account for differences in experiences (i.e. water licence holders compared to community members).



Basin community (n=865)

Quantitative research was conducted via **n=755 online surveys** and **n=50 Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews** with the Basin community. Fieldwork was conducted from 31 October to 21 November 2024.

A targeted survey was conducted with **First Nations peoples** in the Basin via **n=35 online surveys** and **n=25 interviewer-administered surveys (n=60 overall)**. Fieldwork was conducted from 8 November to 9 December 2024.

The survey was conducted with **residents of the Murray–Darling Basin area aged 18 and over**.



Water licence holders (n=203)

Quantitative research was conducted via **n=150 Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI)** and **n=50 online surveys**. An additional **n=3** water licence holder surveys, administered online, were obtained during a targeted **First Nations peoples boost**. Fieldwork was conducted from 31 October to 21 November 2024.

The survey was conducted **with water licence holders who operated in the Murray–Darling Basin**.

Research methodology

Quantitative research methodology (continued)



To ensure coverage of responses across the Basin, 12 areas were identified (shown in different colours in the figure to the left), with minimum quotas set for each area. The number of completed community surveys ranged from n=32-157 per area.

Qualitative research methodology

A further **n=105** people participated in the **qualitative research**, which was conducted between 28 January – 12 March 2025 via: 9 face-to-face focus groups; 2 online focus groups; 2 mini focus groups; 1 paired in-depth interview; and 7 in-depth interviews.* This phase of the research provided in-depth insights and context for understanding the quantitative research data.

* 4 interviews were conducted online/ via telephone

TARGET AUDIENCES



Basin community members (n=82)

Age

- Younger (18-39 years) (n=16)
- Older (40+ years) (n=17)

Engagement with waterways

- Less engaged users (n=15)
- More engaged users (n=14)

First Nations peoples

- Community members (n=18)
- Community Elders (n=2)

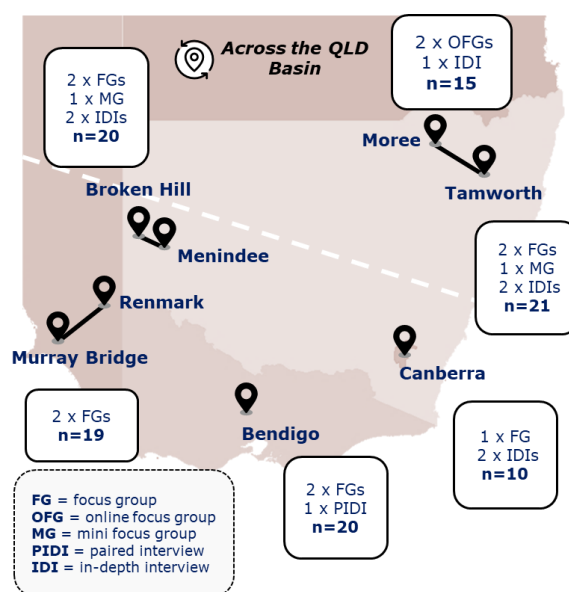


Water licence holders (n=20)



Basin stakeholders (n=3)

LOCATIONS



Research limitations



This project has been designed to track changes across multiple waves of data collection. However, there are **factors outside the control of the research that can influence survey results** to varying degrees. These should be considered when interpreting the results, particularly when making time-series comparisons.

External factors

There are several external factors that may influence participation rates and the nature of feedback provided, particularly among water licence holder respondents:



Environmental factors – such as lower-than-average monthly inflows in the 6 months leading up to the 2024 data collection period*, flooding events or ecological events including algal blooms or mass fish deaths;



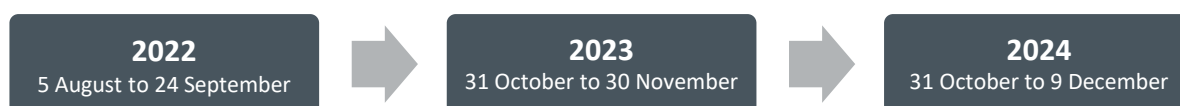
Policy/ program changes – such as Federal Government voluntary water buybacks that commenced in July 2024** that were subject to media coverage at the time of survey fieldwork in 2023, and the Australian Government's Murray–Darling Basin communications campaign which was underway close to 2024 survey fieldwork; and



Population changes – there is evidence of changing trends in the composition of water licence holders, such as a reduction in the number of dairy farmers across the Basin.*** Although sampling was designed to collect representative data (based on the latest available estimates of the community population and number of irrigating farms), demographic shifts can lead to variation in some measures due to changes in the audience composition.

Survey timing

Each survey wave was conducted at the following times during the year:



This slight variation in survey timing may mean seasonal and workforce differences could impact participation rates as well as the nature of feedback provided. This is particularly the case among water licence holders whose work is oriented around seasonal factors, such as harvesting through the summer months (usually from November onwards).

*<https://www.mdba.gov.au/publications-and-data/data-and-dashboards/river-murray-weekly-reports-0>

** <https://www.dccew.gov.au/water/policy/water-recovery/government-water-purchasing/voluntary-restoring-our-rivers>

*** https://daff.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/search/asset/1035603/0

Research limitations (continued...)

Non-response bias

An increase in refusal of water licence holders to participate in surveys has been observed, with response rates declining significantly in 2024, as shown below. Despite high-level audience profiles being similar, non-response bias may alter the psychographic composition of the sample who did respond to the survey.

Audience & mode	2022 response rates	2023 response rates	2024 response rates
Water licence holders: CATI	57%	64%	28%

Note: Response rates exclude irrelevant CATI outcome categories (such as not being eligible to participate or no one picking up the phone).

Anecdotal feedback from interviewers suggests that this increase in refusal to participate was at least in part due to water licence holders feeling “over-consulted” and that their input and needs were not being fully considered. Timing of the survey (i.e. during harvesting period) also likely played a role in the higher refusal rate in 2024.

Given the “consultation fatigue” mentioned, and the increase in survey refusals, it is suggested that **consideration be given to the timing and frequency of conduct for future surveys.**

Note that as a result of these potential limitations, three results for water licence holders in the 2024 data relating to awareness have been adjusted, as they appeared anomalous in light of the relative consistency of other data and trends. Results from 2023 have been used in these instances as the best available estimate of these measures. These were:

- The proportion of water licence holders who had **heard of the Plan**;
- The proportion of water licence holders who had **heard of the Inspector-General**; and
- The proportion of water licence holders who were **aware the Inspector-General is responsible for overseeing compliance and enforcement of water rules** in the Basin.



Project background

In May 2021, the Australian Government introduced a Bill amending the Water Act 2007 (the Water Act) to establish the Inspector-General of Water Compliance (the Inspector-General) to oversee and monitor water compliance in the Murray–Darling Basin (the Basin). Through this role, the Inspector-General commits to delivering trust and transparency, accountability, and engagement with the community around the management of Basin water resources. In 2022, ORIMA Research conducted initial exploratory research with Basin community members and water licence holders to establish baseline community perceptions and sentiment towards water management, compliance and enforcement in the Basin, and to inform the establishment of the Inspector-General’s community sentiment KPIs. Subsequently in 2023 and 2024, the Inspector-General commissioned ORIMA Research to conduct tracking research to monitor changes in community sentiment over time, as well as to measure performance against the KPIs. This report presents the findings from the community sentiment survey and qualitative research conducted in late 2024 and early 2025.

Weighting considerations in the quantitative research methodology

The questionnaires differed somewhat across the audiences to account for differences in experiences (i.e. water licence holders compared to community members). The survey data for the community audiences was weighted to align the sample distributions for age, location, gender and First Nations status with their respective population benchmarks from ABS Census data. The survey data for water licence holders was weighted to align the sample distribution across the Basin States/ Territory with that of the number of irrigating farms, based on ABS farm water use statistics. Note that in 2023, updates to the weighting approach were retrospectively made to the 2022 data to factor in the most recent and robust data publicly available. This update accounts for some minor differences to results previously reported in 2022.

Explanatory notes (continued...)

Presentation of findings throughout the report

When reporting the research results, the following references have been used to differentiate between the quantitative and qualitative research findings:

- The term '**respondent(s)**' refers to respondent(s) from the quantitative survey whilst '**participant(s)**' refers to participant(s) in the qualitative research; and
- **Numbers** and **percentages** used refer only to the quantitative research findings.

Understanding the quantitative research findings

Percentages from the quantitative survey presented in this report are based on the total number of valid responses made to the question being reported on. In most cases, results reflect those respondents who had a view and for whom the questions were applicable.

Results may not add to 100% due to rounding. In stacked bar charts, results less than 5% may not be displayed for ease of reading and clarity. 'n' refers to the total number of individuals in the sample for that question.

Understanding the qualitative research findings

In some cases, qualitative data has been presented without quantitative data. In these cases, it should be noted that the exact number of participants holding a particular view on individual issues cannot be measured*.

The following terms used in the report provide a qualitative indication and approximation of the size of the target audience who held particular views:



Most—refers to findings that relate to **more than three quarters** of the research participants;



Many—refers to findings that relate to **more than half** of the research participants;



Some—refers to findings that relate to **around a third** of the research participants; and



A few—refers to findings that relate to **less than a quarter** of research participants.

The most common qualitative findings are reported except in certain situations where only a minority have raised particular issues, but these are nevertheless considered to be important and to have potentially wide-ranging implications or applications.

*Measurement is not the intent of qualitative research.

This project was conducted in accordance with the international quality standard ISO 20252, the international information security standard ISO 27001, as well as the Australian Privacy Principles contained in the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth). ORIMA Research also adheres to the Privacy (Market and Social Research) Code 2021 administered by the Australian Data and Insights Association (ADIA).