

Polling - South Australian impressions of the Murray Darling Basin

April 2019

Key Results

The Australia Institute surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,536 Australians, and 624 South Australians, about their views towards issues surrounding the health and management of the Murray Darling Basin (MDB).

Respondents were informed that the Murray Darling is a major agricultural region which is of great environmental significance, and that its management often attracts significant political and policy debate. They were then asked about different aspects of the MDB, including river health, management, water theft and farm profitability.

South Australians were far more likely than Australians over all, and more likely than all other MDB states, to think every aspect of the Murray Darling Basin was poor or very poor. This was particularly pronounced for river health and management of the Basin. South Australians were also less likely to think rules were well enforced or that water is shared fairly between states.

Figure 1: Views of the Murray Darling Basin (South Australia)

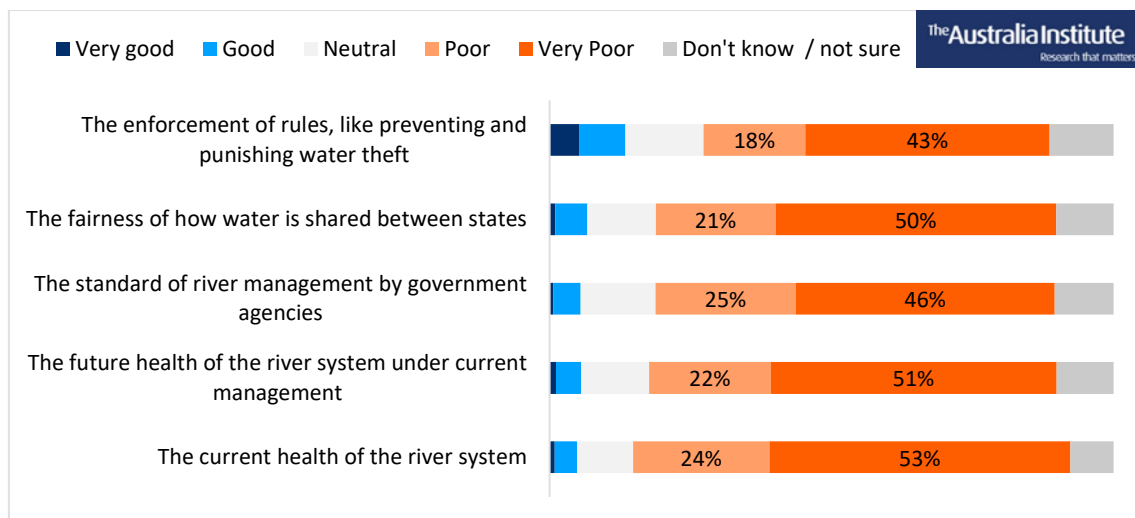


Figure 2: Irrigation draw water upstream while towns downstream lack drinking water and there are mass fish kills?

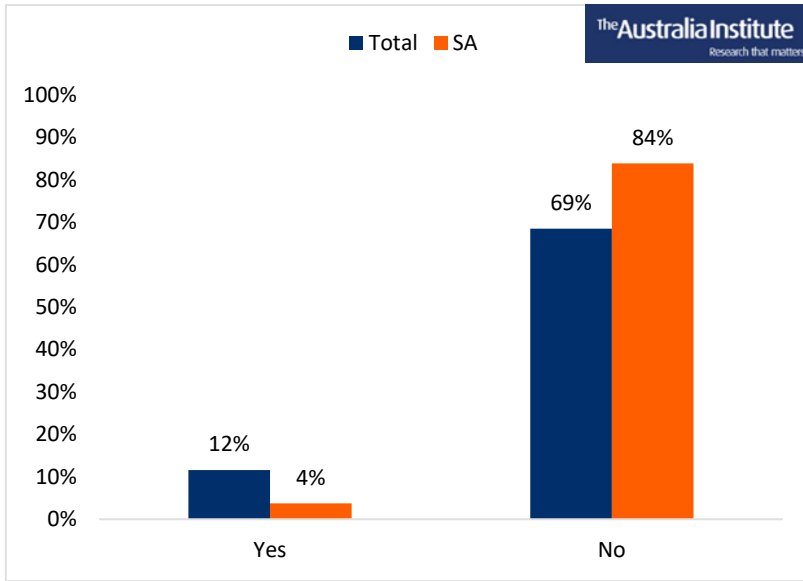


Figure 3: Federal Royal Commission into management of Murray Darling Basin?

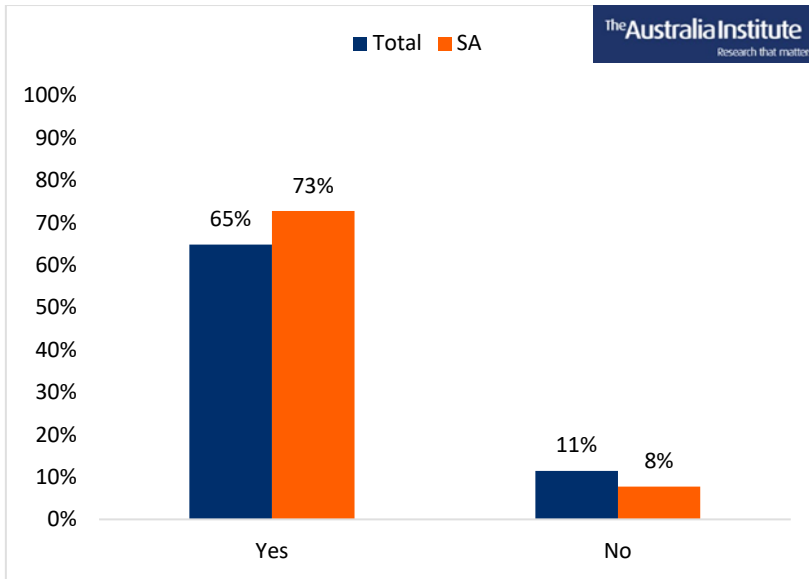
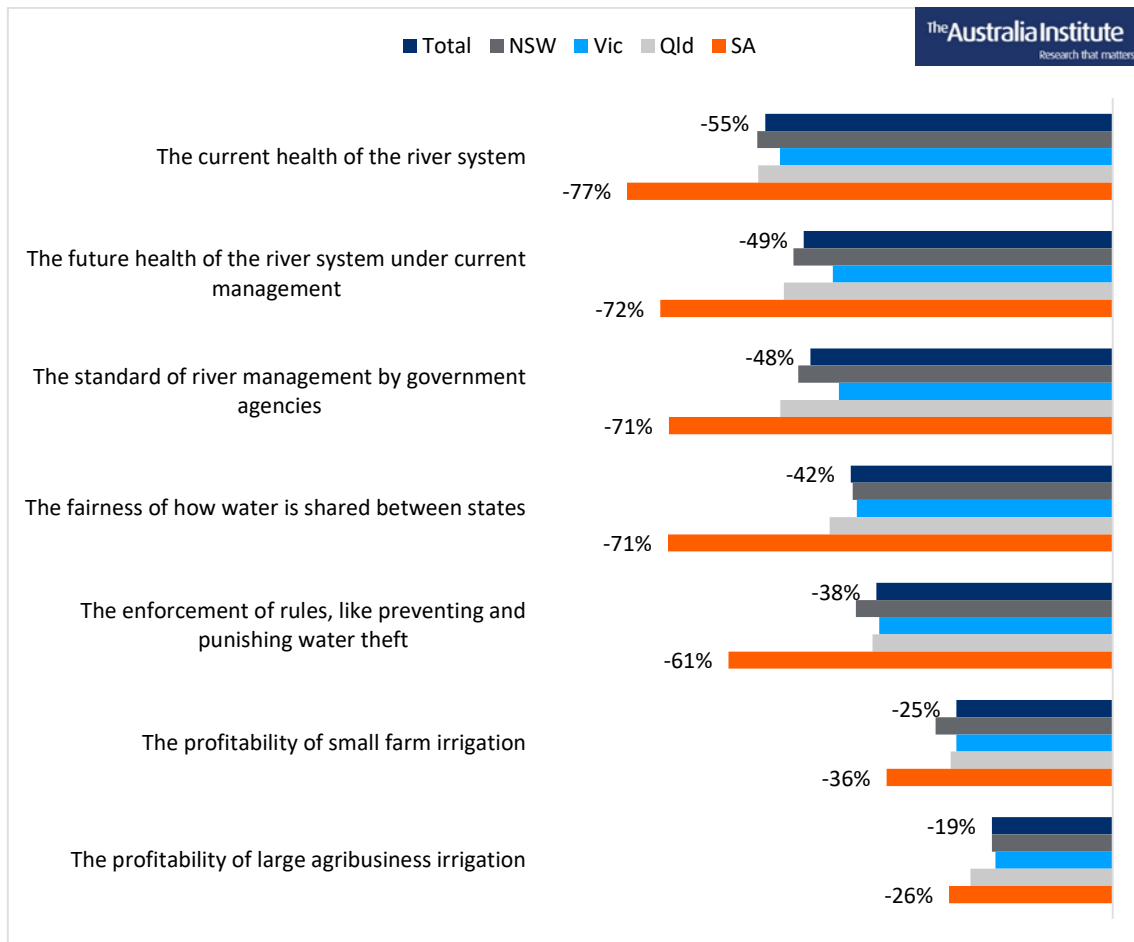


Figure 4: Aspects of Murray Darling Basin viewed as poor or very poor, by state



- Over three-quarters (77%) of South Australians said the current health of the river system is poor or very poor, 22 percentage points higher than Australians overall (55%).
 - Over half in South Australia (53%) said the current health is very poor.
- Nearly three in four (72%) South Australians said the *future* health of the river system under current management is poor or very poor, 23 percentage points higher than the share of total Australians (49%).
 - Over half of South Australians (51%) say the future health is very poor.
- Over seven in 10 South Australians said the standard of river management by government agencies (71%) and the fairness of how water is shared between states (71%) is poor or very poor.
- South Australians were also a little more likely to think both big and small farm profitability was poor.

Another way of presenting these results is in ‘net’ terms, subtracting the share of respondents with a poor or very poor impression from the share with a good or very good impression.

- South Australians have a net overall negative impression of all aspects of the Murray Darling Basin.
- Compared with Australians over all, South Australians were significantly more likely to have a negative view and less likely to have a positive view of overwhelmingly so for river health, now and into the future and management.
- The biggest differences were between of how water is shared between states (37 percentage points) and the enforcement of rules (34 percentage points).

Figure 5: Views of the Murray Darling Basin – “net” (positive minus negative)

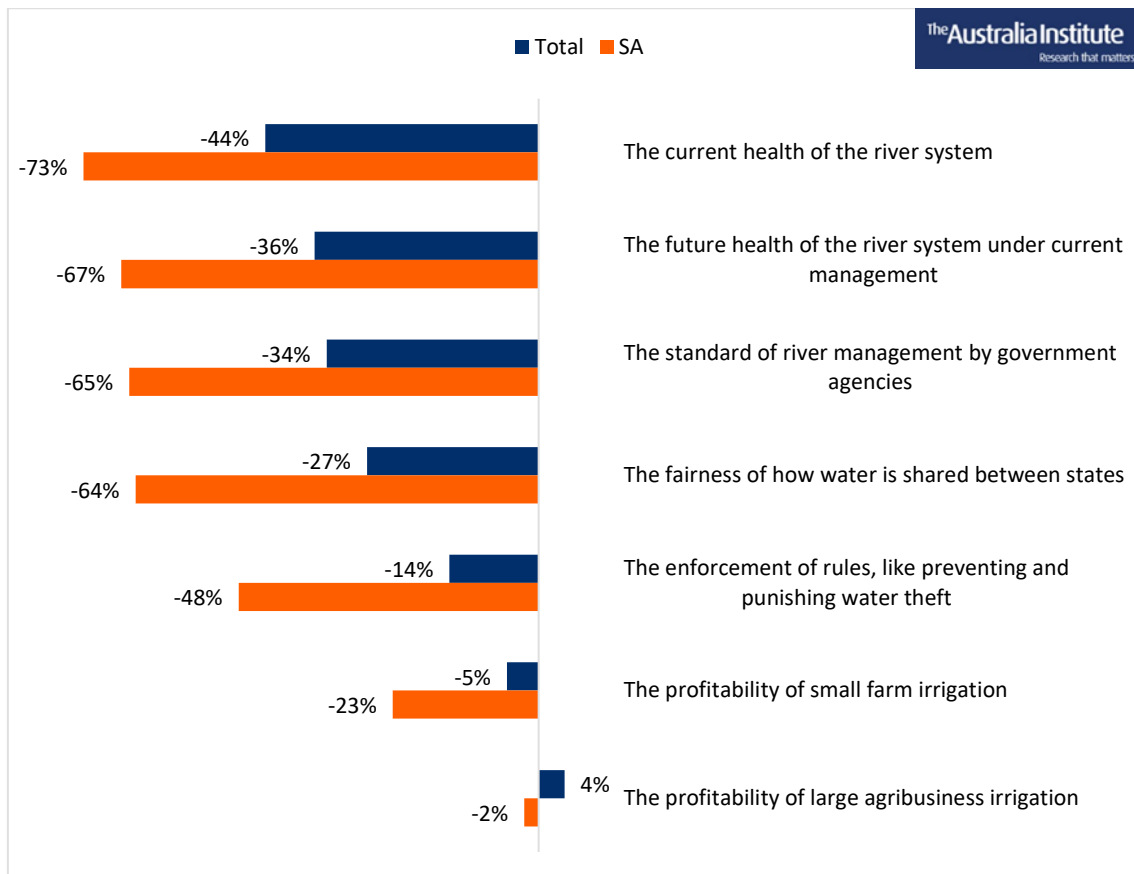


Figure 6: Views of the Murray Darling Basin (South Australia)

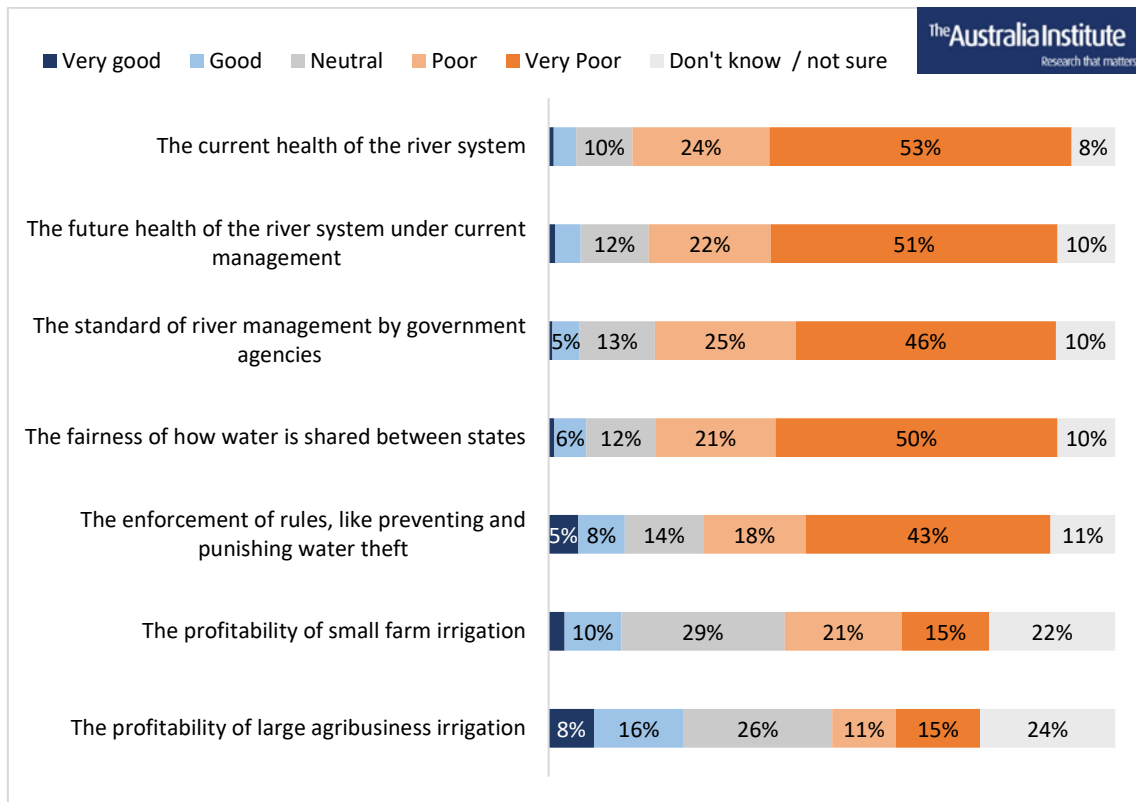
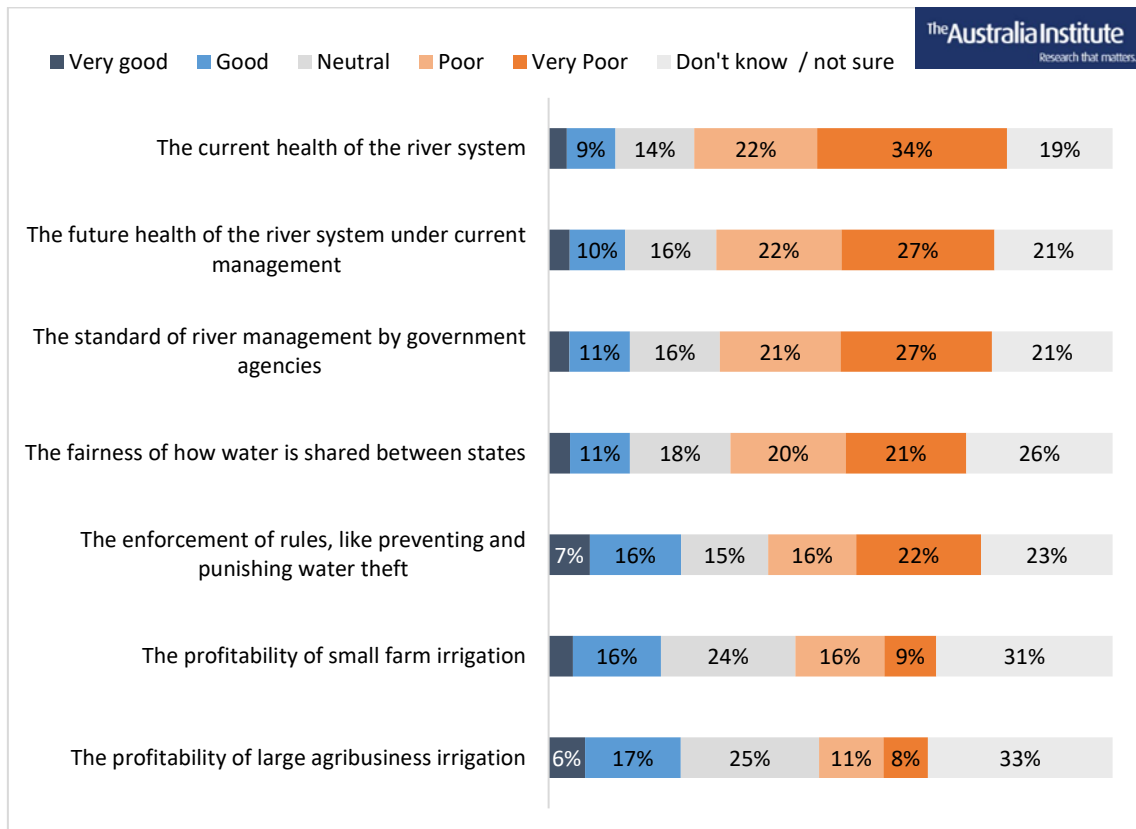


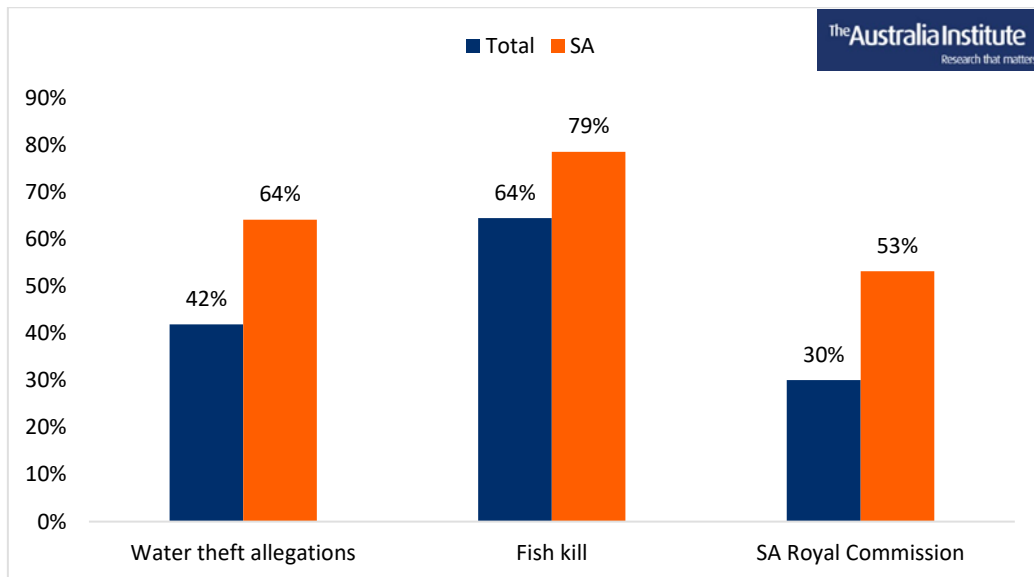
Figure 7: Views of the Murray Darling Basin (Australia)



Respondents were also asked whether they had heard about recent controversies in the Murray Darling Basin.

- South Australians were more likely to have heard about each controversy than Australians were in general.
- Four-fifths of South Australians (79%) have heard about the recent mass fish kill event in the Lower Darling River, compared to 64% of all Australians
- Two-thirds of South Australians (64%) have heard about allegations of large-scale water theft in the Murray Darling Basin, compared to 42% of all Australians
- Over half of South Australians (53%) have heard about the report from the South Australian Royal Commission into management of the Murray Darling Basin rivers

Figure 8: Respondents that have heard about ...



Respondents were asked two policy questions about the management of the Murray Darling Basin rivers.

- Three-quarters of South Australians (73%) said there should be a Commonwealth Royal Commission into the management of the Murray Darling Basin rivers, compared to 65% of all Australians
 - Only 8% of South Australians said there should not be a Commonwealth Royal Commission
- Only 4% of South Australians said that irrigation businesses upstream in the Darling Basin should be allowed to draw water to irrigate crops when downstream towns are without drinking water and there are mass fish kills, compared to 12% of all Australians.
 - 84% of South Australians said that upstream irrigation businesses should not be allowed to draw water in those circumstances.

Figure 9: Should upstream irrigators be allowed to draw water while downstream towns are without drinking water and there are mass fish kills?

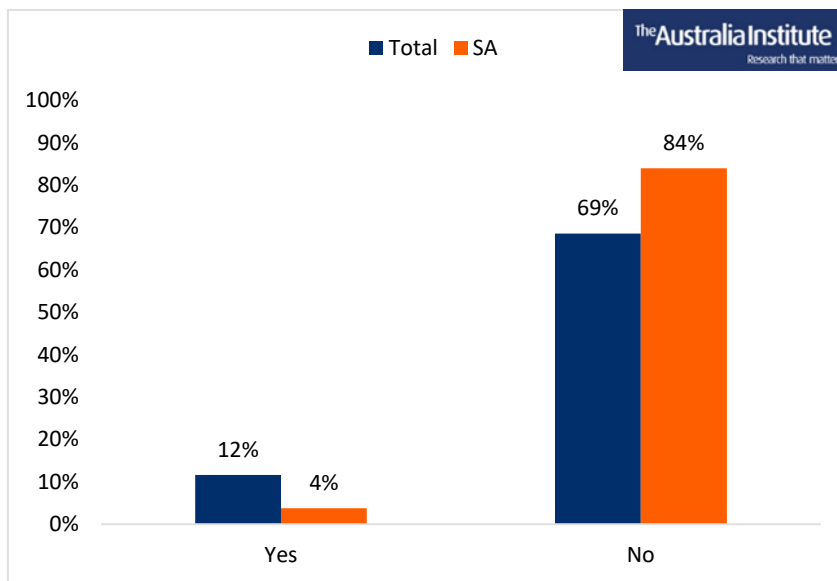
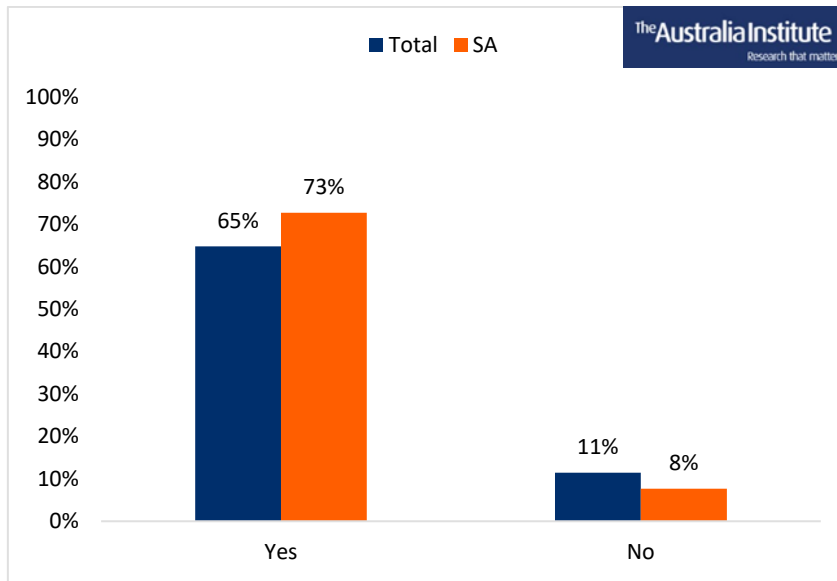


Figure 10: Should there be a Commonwealth Royal Commission into the management of the Murray Darling Basin rivers?



Method

The Australia Institute conducted a national survey of 1,532 people between 20 February 2019 and 4 March 2019. The survey was conducted online through Research Now/Dynata, with nationally representative samples by gender, age and state and territory. In the 2019 survey, results were further post-weighted by gender.

The Australia Institute also surveyed 624 South Australians. Results were post-weighted to match state demographics by age and gender.

Results are shown only for larger states, and for South Australia using the results from the expanded sample.

Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the lower house. Those who were undecided were asked which way they were leaning; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs, but results are also shown separately for undecideds. "LNP" includes separate responses for Liberal and National. "Other" includes Centre Alliance, United Australia Party and Independent/Other.

Detailed results

The Murray Darling Basin is the largest river system in Australia, covering parts of Queensland, NSW, ACT, Victoria and South Australia. It is a major agricultural region, is of great environmental significance and its management often attracts significant political and policy debate.

Regarding the Murray Darling Basin, what is your impression of the following?

(options given in randomized order)

The current health of the river system

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Total Good	5%	6%	4%	7%	5%	8%	2%	2%	2%
Total Poor	77%	79%	76%	79%	75%	73%	79%	80%	88%
Very good	1%	2%	0%	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Good	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%	7%	2%	2%	2%
Neutral	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	11%	13%	7%	2%
Poor	24%	26%	22%	33%	20%	17%	25%	18%	21%
Very Poor	53%	53%	53%	47%	55%	56%	53%	62%	67%
Don't know / not sure	8%	5%	10%	4%	10%	7%	6%	11%	8%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Total Good	12%	13%	14%	10%	13%	5%
Total Poor	55%	57%	53%	57%	38%	77%
Very good	3%	3%	5%	3%	2%	1%
Good	9%	10%	8%	8%	11%	4%
Neutral	14%	12%	15%	14%	25%	10%
Poor	22%	21%	23%	23%	19%	24%
Very Poor	34%	36%	30%	33%	19%	53%
Don't know / not sure	19%	18%	19%	19%	24%	8%

The profitability of large agribusiness irrigation

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Total Good	24%	30%	19%	24%	23%	24%	27%	24%	25%
Total Poor	26%	25%	27%	26%	26%	32%	26%	24%	15%
Very good	8%	12%	5%	8%	7%	9%	9%	8%	6%
Good	16%	18%	14%	16%	15%	15%	18%	16%	19%
Neutral	26%	28%	25%	30%	24%	23%	20%	26%	33%
Poor	11%	11%	12%	11%	12%	12%	12%	9%	3%
Very Poor	15%	14%	16%	15%	14%	20%	13%	15%	12%
Don't know / not sure	24%	18%	29%	20%	26%	21%	27%	26%	27%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Total Good	23%	29%	23%	20%	20%	24%
Total Poor	19%	19%	19%	23%	9%	26%
Very good	6%	6%	8%	5%	5%	8%
Good	17%	22%	15%	14%	15%	16%
Neutral	25%	23%	21%	25%	32%	26%
Poor	11%	12%	11%	14%	6%	11%
Very Poor	8%	7%	8%	8%	3%	15%
Don't know / not sure	33%	29%	37%	32%	39%	24%

The profitability of small farm irrigation

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Total Good	13%	14%	12%	12%	10%	14%	22%	16%	16%
Total Poor	36%	39%	33%	37%	35%	45%	28%	36%	32%
Very good	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	5%	4%	4%	0%
Good	10%	11%	9%	9%	8%	9%	18%	12%	16%
Neutral	29%	29%	29%	33%	30%	20%	22%	26%	31%
Poor	21%	24%	18%	22%	22%	22%	18%	18%	14%
Very Poor	15%	15%	15%	15%	14%	23%	11%	18%	18%
Don't know / not sure	22%	18%	26%	19%	25%	21%	27%	22%	21%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Total Good	20%	23%	19%	18%	21%	13%
Total Poor	25%	28%	25%	26%	9%	36%
Very good	4%	5%	4%	4%	3%	3%
Good	16%	18%	15%	14%	18%	10%
Neutral	24%	20%	22%	28%	32%	29%
Poor	16%	17%	17%	17%	5%	21%
Very Poor	9%	12%	8%	9%	3%	15%
Don't know / not sure	31%	29%	34%	28%	38%	22%

The fairness of how water is shared between states

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Total Good	7%	7%	7%	10%	5%	4%	10%	3%	2%
Total Poor	71%	74%	68%	69%	69%	78%	71%	75%	79%
Very good	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Good	6%	5%	6%	9%	3%	2%	10%	3%	2%
Neutral	12%	12%	12%	13%	14%	9%	10%	10%	8%
Poor	21%	24%	19%	27%	20%	20%	21%	15%	30%
Very Poor	50%	50%	49%	43%	49%	58%	50%	61%	50%
Don't know / not sure	10%	7%	13%	7%	13%	9%	10%	12%	10%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Total Good	14%	16%	16%	11%	14%	7%
Total Poor	42%	42%	41%	45%	20%	71%
Very good	4%	3%	7%	3%	3%	1%
Good	11%	13%	10%	8%	12%	6%
Neutral	18%	16%	18%	18%	27%	12%
Poor	20%	18%	23%	26%	12%	21%
Very Poor	21%	23%	18%	20%	9%	50%
Don't know / not sure	26%	26%	25%	25%	38%	10%

The standard of river management by government agencies

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Total Good	5%	5%	6%	8%	4%	4%	6%	4%	2%
Total Poor	71%	76%	67%	72%	71%	66%	67%	73%	86%
Very good	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%
Good	5%	4%	5%	8%	3%	4%	4%	4%	2%
Neutral	13%	12%	14%	12%	15%	20%	17%	6%	2%
Poor	25%	25%	24%	28%	27%	19%	21%	18%	30%
Very Poor	46%	50%	42%	43%	43%	47%	46%	54%	56%
Don't know / not sure	10%	7%	13%	8%	10%	10%	10%	17%	10%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Total Good	14%	16%	16%	11%	18%	5%
Total Poor	48%	50%	44%	53%	31%	71%
Very good	4%	3%	5%	3%	5%	1%
Good	11%	12%	11%	8%	13%	5%
Neutral	16%	16%	16%	15%	24%	13%
Poor	21%	20%	21%	26%	17%	25%
Very Poor	27%	30%	23%	27%	14%	46%
Don't know / not sure	21%	19%	24%	20%	27%	10%

The enforcement of rules, like preventing and punishing water theft

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Total Good	13%	12%	14%	16%	13%	15%	10%	10%	15%
Total Poor	61%	68%	55%	63%	57%	54%	67%	67%	62%
Very good	5%	6%	5%	5%	6%	7%	4%	4%	5%
Good	8%	6%	10%	12%	7%	8%	6%	5%	10%
Neutral	14%	12%	15%	12%	17%	19%	13%	10%	12%
Poor	18%	18%	18%	20%	18%	8%	20%	16%	7%
Very Poor	43%	51%	37%	42%	39%	46%	47%	51%	55%
Don't know / not sure	11%	7%	15%	8%	13%	12%	10%	14%	10%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Total Good	23%	25%	25%	20%	25%	13%
Total Poor	38%	41%	37%	38%	20%	61%
Very good	7%	6%	10%	5%	8%	5%
Good	16%	19%	16%	15%	17%	8%
Neutral	15%	13%	14%	17%	22%	14%
Poor	16%	16%	17%	16%	10%	18%
Very Poor	22%	25%	20%	22%	10%	43%
Don't know / not sure	23%	21%	24%	24%	33%	11%

The future health of the river system under current management

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Total Good	6%	6%	5%	8%	4%	9%	10%	1%	0%
Total Poor	72%	75%	70%	73%	71%	75%	67%	74%	77%
Very good	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%
Good	4%	5%	4%	6%	3%	9%	8%	1%	0%
Neutral	12%	13%	11%	11%	14%	9%	11%	14%	13%
Poor	22%	22%	21%	28%	20%	22%	14%	16%	18%
Very Poor	51%	53%	49%	45%	51%	53%	53%	58%	59%
Don't know / not sure	10%	6%	14%	9%	11%	7%	12%	11%	10%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Total Good	14%	15%	17%	10%	13%	6%
Total Poor	49%	51%	45%	52%	33%	72%
Very good	4%	4%	5%	3%	5%	1%
Good	10%	11%	12%	7%	8%	4%
Neutral	16%	15%	16%	16%	28%	12%
Poor	22%	22%	21%	25%	20%	22%
Very Poor	27%	29%	23%	27%	12%	51%
Don't know / not sure	21%	19%	23%	22%	26%	10%

Have you heard about allegations of large-scale water theft in the Murray Darling Basin?

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Yes	64%	72%	57%	66%	58%	69%	66%	69%	73%
No	26%	21%	31%	28%	30%	23%	25%	20%	12%
Don't know / not sure	9%	7%	12%	6%	12%	9%	8%	11%	15%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Yes	42%	45%	37%	45%	27%	64%
No	45%	43%	49%	43%	61%	26%
Don't know / not sure	13%	13%	14%	12%	12%	9%

Have you heard about the recent mass fish kill event in the Lower Darling River?

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Yes	79%	83%	75%	82%	71%	88%	81%	81%	83%
No	17%	14%	21%	16%	22%	9%	19%	15%	12%
Don't know / not sure	4%	3%	5%	2%	7%	2%	0%	5%	5%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Yes	64%	72%	60%	63%	45%	79%
No	29%	23%	31%	33%	45%	17%
Don't know / not sure	7%	5%	10%	4%	10%	4%

Have you heard about the report from the South Australian Royal Commission into management of the Murray Darling Basin rivers?

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Yes	53%	62%	46%	59%	47%	44%	53%	57%	61%
No	36%	28%	42%	31%	39%	38%	45%	34%	30%
Don't know / not sure	11%	9%	12%	11%	13%	18%	2%	9%	9%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Yes	30%	34%	26%	27%	18%	53%
No	57%	55%	60%	61%	66%	36%
Don't know / not sure	13%	11%	14%	12%	16%	11%

Should there be a Commonwealth Royal Commission into the management of the Murray Darling Basin rivers?

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Yes	73%	77%	69%	71%	71%	74%	77%	77%	82%
No	8%	8%	7%	12%	6%	10%	2%	5%	3%
Don't know / not sure	20%	15%	23%	18%	23%	15%	21%	18%	16%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Yes	65%	68%	64%	65%	57%	73%
No	11%	11%	13%	11%	12%	8%
Don't know / not sure	24%	20%	24%	25%	31%	20%

Should irrigation businesses upstream in the Darling Basin be allowed to draw water to irrigate crops when downstream towns are without drinking water and there are mass fish kills?

	SA Total	Male	Female	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other	CA
Yes	4%	3%	4%	4%	5%	5%	2%	2%	3%
No	84%	86%	83%	85%	82%	82%	89%	86%	87%
Don't know / not sure	12%	11%	13%	11%	13%	14%	9%	13%	10%

	National Total	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA
Yes	12%	15%	9%	11%	12%	4%
No	69%	67%	68%	71%	63%	84%
Don't know / not sure	20%	17%	22%	18%	25%	12%