

Polling - Murray Darling Basin

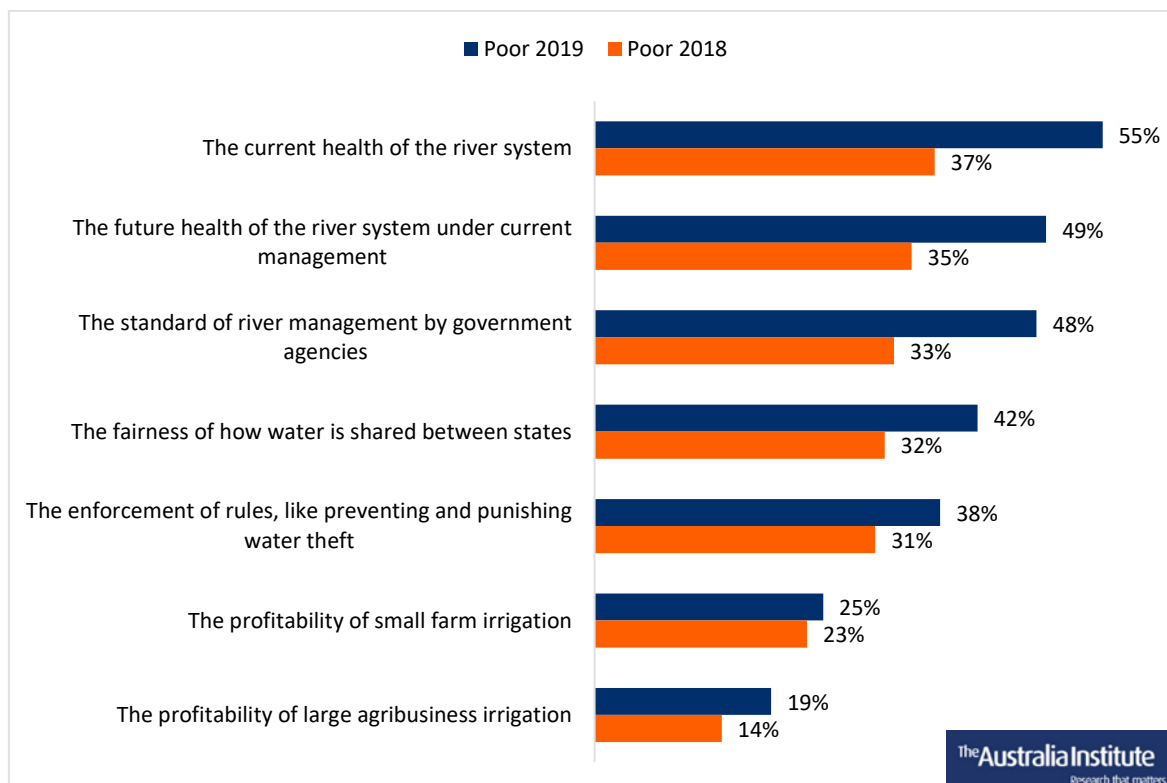
April 2019

Early 2018 and in 2019, The Australia Institute surveyed a nationally representative sample of 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.

While in 2018 few had strong views about the state of the MDB, the 2019 results show a large increase in negative perceptions of MDB, especially that the health and management of the MDB is in a poor state.

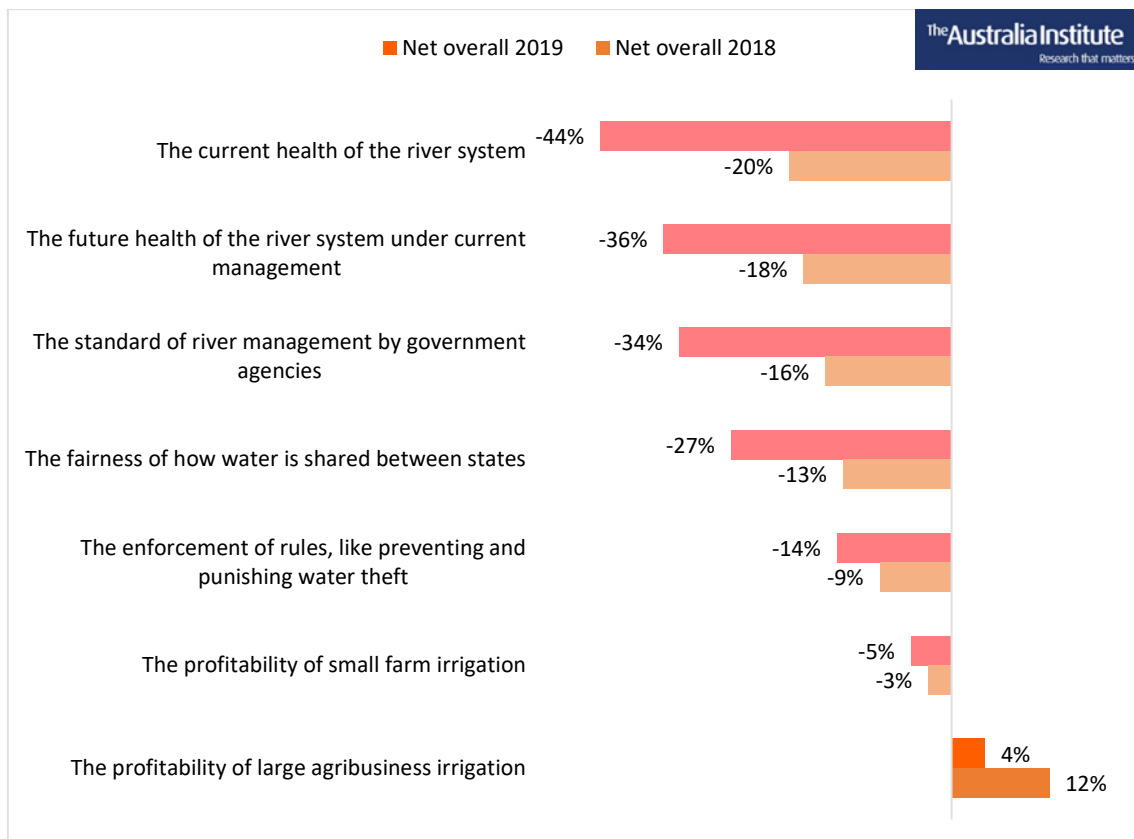
Figure 1: Impressions of the Murray Darling Basin – poor or very poor



- Over half (55%) said the current health of the river system is poor, up 18 percentage points since 2018 (37%).
- A third said the health of the river system is very poor (37%) – three times greater than in 2018 (11%).
- Half of Australians (49%) said the *future* health of the river system under current management is poor or very poor, up from a third (33%) in 2018.
- Half of Australians (48%) said the standard of river management by government agencies is poor or very poor, up from a third (33%) in 2018.
- Two in five Australians said the fairness of how water is shared between states (42%) and the enforcement of rules, like preventing and punishing water theft (38%) were poor or very poor.
- There has also been an increase in negative views about farm profitability.

Another way of presenting the data is in terms of ‘net’ results, subtracting the share of Australians with a poor impression from the share with a good impression.

Figure 2: Regarding the Murray Darling Basin, what is your impression of ...



- Views about all aspects of the MDB have deteriorated over the past year.
- The net impression of the current health of the river system has fallen in one year from -20% to -44%.
- The only aspect with a net positive impression is the profitability of large agribusiness, with a positive result of 4%. Even this result has fallen from 12% in 2019.

Full results are shown below.

- In 2018, there were high numbers selecting 'neutral' or 'don't know' for every aspect of the MDB – from a minimum of 46% to a maximum of 60%. In each case this was more than those who selected poor.
- In 2019, 'neutral' and 'don't know' fell dramatically, especially regarding the current health of the MDB (33%, down 13 points) and management (38%, down 12 points).
- In 2019, for most aspects of the MDB people were more likely to think they were very poor than to think they were merely poor. Clearly the events of the last year have lead many Australians to hold strong views about the state of the Basin.

Figure 3: Impressions of the Murray Darling Basin (in 2018)

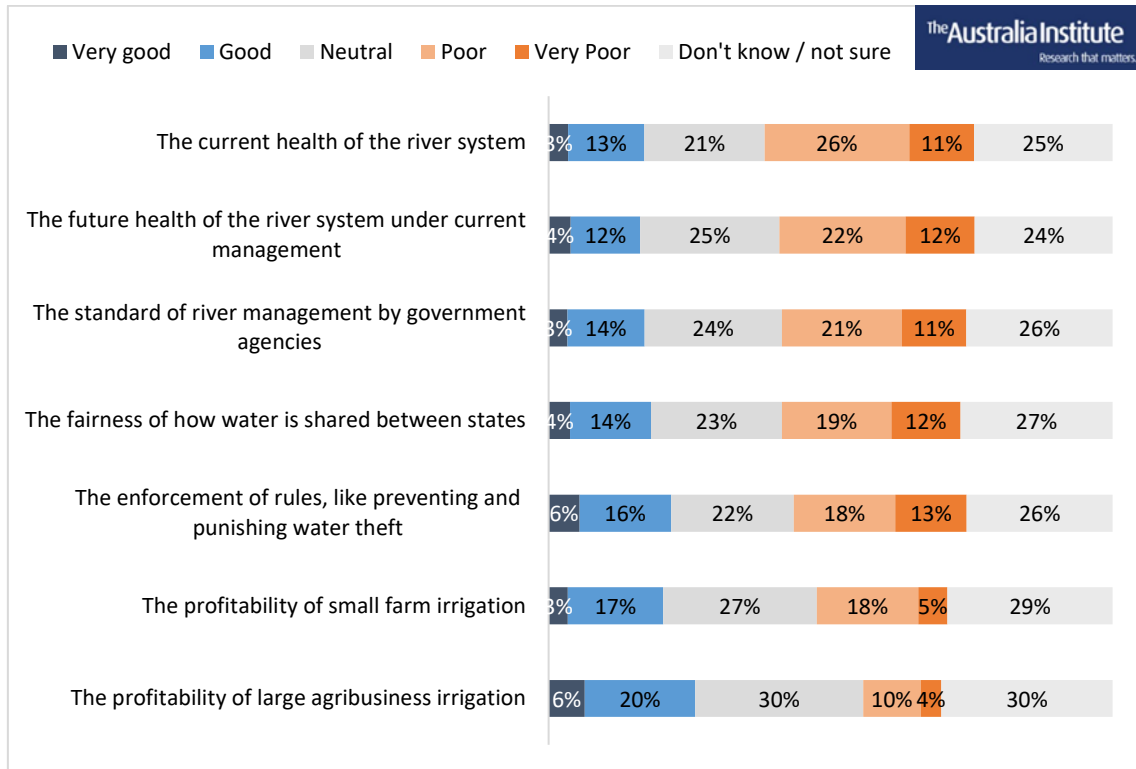
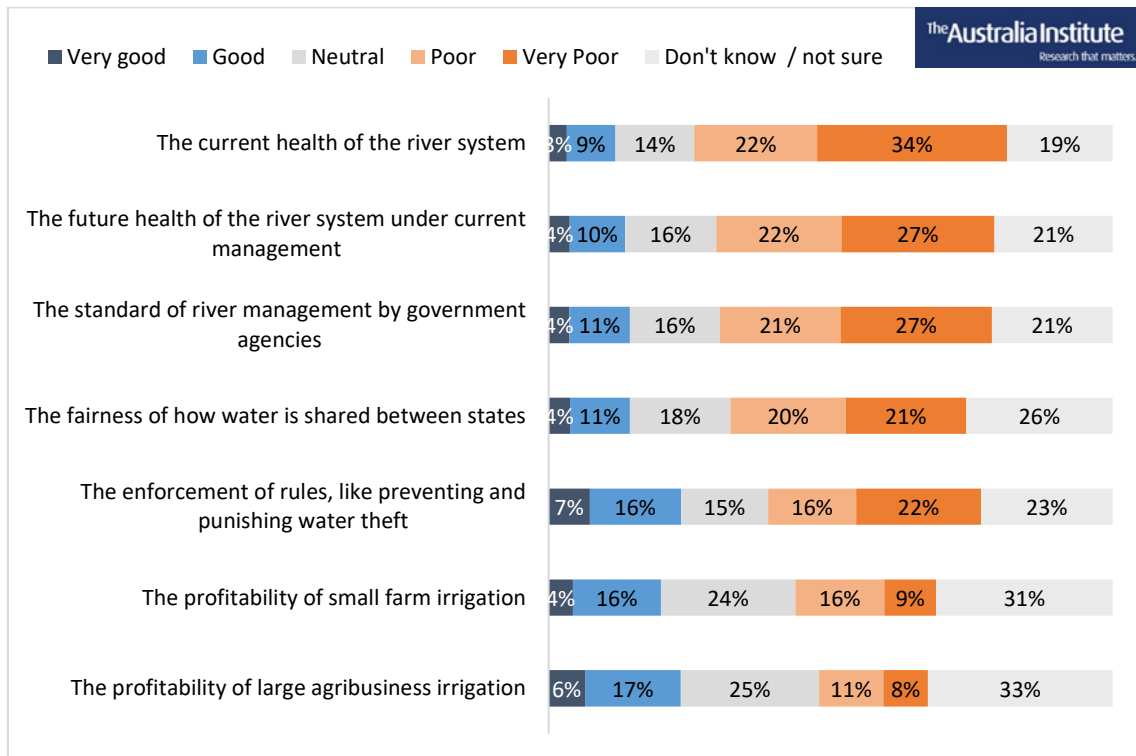
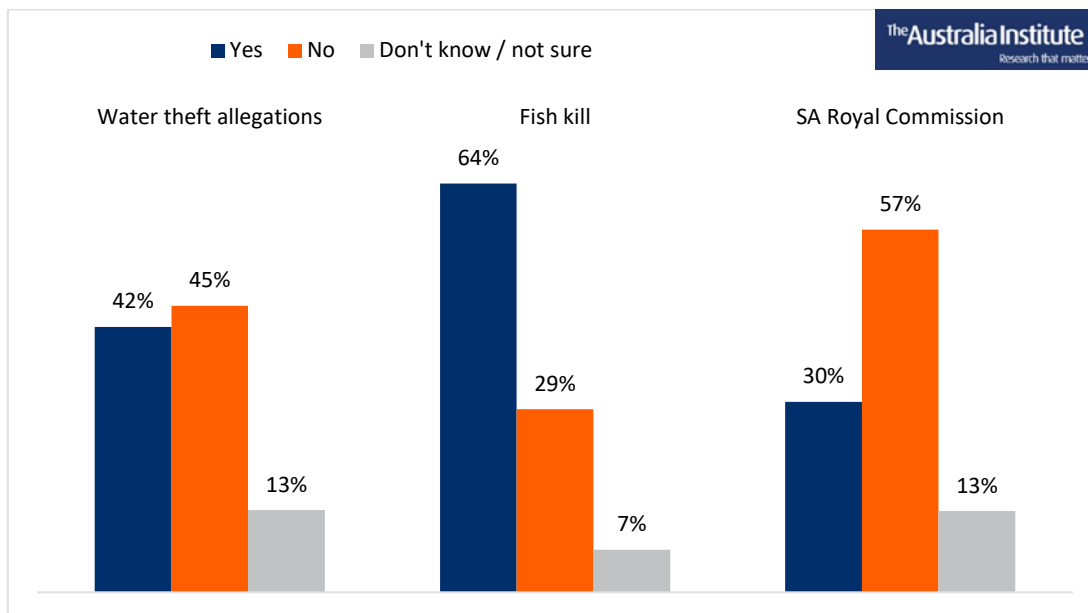


Figure 4: Impression of an aspect of the Murray Darling Basin (in 2019)



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

Figure 5: Whether respondents have heard about ...



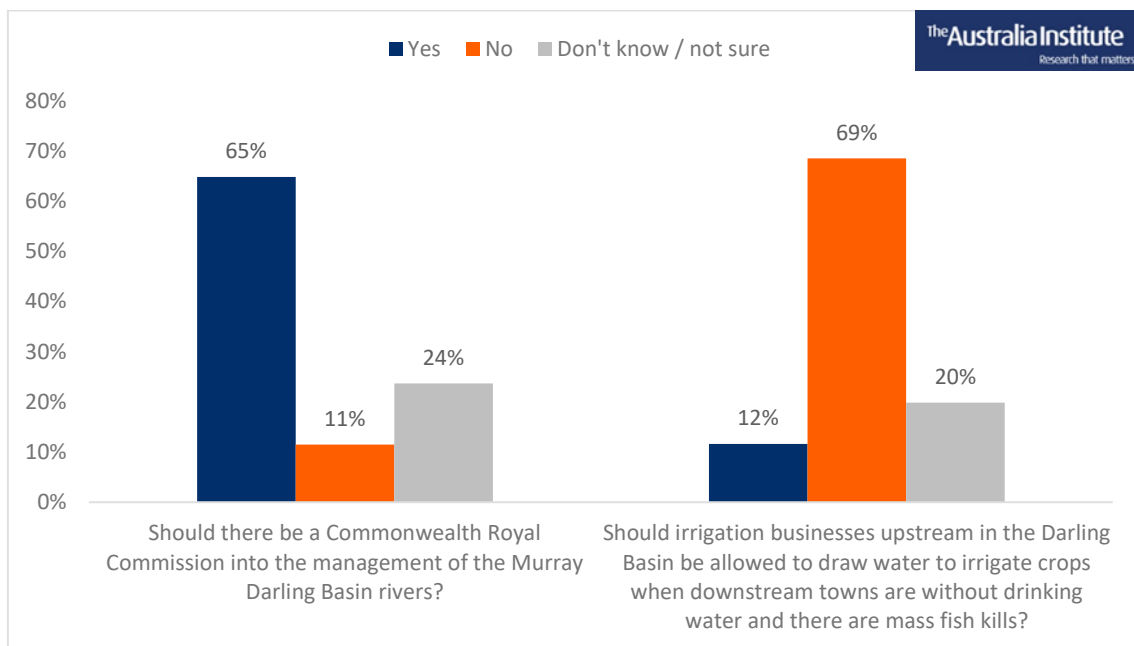
- Almost two-thirds of Australians (64%) have heard about the recent mass fish kill event in the Lower Darling River
 - This included three in four of people from NSW (72%).
- Two in five Australians (42%) have heard about allegations of large-scale water theft in the Murray Darling Basin
- Almost one-third of Australians (30%) have heard about the report from the South Australian Royal Commission into management of the Murray Darling Basin rivers

In the 2018 poll, respondents were also asked about whether they have heard about allegations of water theft. This earlier poll followed extensive news coverage on the matter, following a landmark episode of ABC's *Four Corners*. In the earlier poll, 34% had heard of allegations of water theft. One year later, this has increased to 42%.

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

- Two-thirds of Australians (65%) said there should be a Commonwealth Royal Commission into the management of the Murray Darling Basin rivers
 - Only 11% of Australians said there should not be a Commonwealth Royal Commission
- Only 12% of 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.
 - Over two-thirds of Australians (69%) said that upstream irrigation businesses should not be allowed to draw water in those circumstances.
- In both cases, fewer than one in four Australians said they didn't know or weren't sure, showing that Australians have strong views on MDB policy questions.

Figure 6: Support or opposition for MDB policy positions



Method

The Australia Institute conducted a national survey of 1,557 people between 27 March and 7 April 2018 and a second national survey of 1,532 people between 20 February 2019 and 4 March 2019. Both surveys were 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.

Results are shown only for larger states.

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

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>LNP</i>	<i>ALP</i>	<i>GRN</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Total Good	12%	14%	10%	13%	14%	10%	13%	15%	12%	12%	8%	8%
Total Poor	55%	57%	54%	57%	53%	57%	38%	54%	55%	58%	66%	52%
Very good	3%	4%	2%	3%	5%	3%	2%	4%	3%	4%	2%	2%
Good	9%	10%	8%	10%	8%	8%	11%	11%	9%	8%	6%	6%
Neutral	14%	14%	14%	12%	15%	14%	25%	15%	14%	16%	11%	12%
Poor	22%	24%	20%	21%	23%	23%	19%	25%	22%	19%	18%	19%
Very Poor	34%	34%	34%	36%	30%	33%	19%	29%	33%	39%	48%	34%
Don't know / not sure	19%	14%	23%	18%	19%	19%	24%	16%	19%	14%	15%	28%

The profitability of large agribusiness irrigation

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other
Total Good	23%	29%	18%	29%	23%	20%	20%	25%	25%	23%	23%	17%
Total Poor	19%	20%	19%	19%	19%	23%	9%	16%	19%	24%	20%	21%
Very good	6%	9%	4%	6%	8%	5%	5%	6%	7%	10%	4%	5%
Good	17%	20%	14%	22%	15%	14%	15%	19%	18%	13%	18%	13%
Neutral	25%	27%	22%	23%	21%	25%	32%	29%	22%	23%	32%	20%
Poor	11%	12%	11%	12%	11%	14%	6%	11%	11%	13%	11%	13%
Very Poor	8%	8%	8%	7%	8%	8%	3%	5%	9%	11%	10%	8%
Don't know / not sure	33%	24%	41%	29%	37%	32%	39%	30%	33%	31%	25%	41%

The profitability of small farm irrigation

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other
Total Good	20%	24%	16%	23%	19%	18%	21%	21%	20%	21%	15%	19%
Total Poor	25%	26%	24%	28%	25%	26%	9%	25%	24%	24%	29%	24%
Very good	4%	6%	3%	5%	4%	4%	3%	5%	3%	6%	2%	5%
Good	16%	18%	13%	18%	15%	14%	18%	16%	17%	15%	13%	14%
Neutral	24%	26%	22%	20%	22%	28%	32%	27%	23%	19%	31%	20%
Poor	16%	17%	15%	17%	17%	17%	5%	19%	15%	15%	17%	12%
Very Poor	9%	8%	10%	12%	8%	9%	3%	6%	9%	9%	12%	12%
Don't know / not sure	31%	24%	38%	29%	34%	28%	38%	27%	33%	36%	24%	37%

The fairness of how water is shared between states

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>LNP</i>	<i>ALP</i>	<i>GRN</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Total Good	14%	16%	13%	16%	16%	11%	14%	17%	15%	18%	8%	9%
Total Poor	42%	45%	39%	42%	41%	45%	20%	42%	41%	41%	52%	38%
Very good	4%	5%	3%	3%	7%	3%	3%	6%	3%	3%	2%	3%
Good	11%	11%	10%	13%	10%	8%	12%	11%	12%	14%	6%	6%
Neutral	18%	19%	16%	16%	18%	18%	27%	18%	19%	15%	23%	14%
Poor	20%	23%	18%	18%	23%	26%	12%	27%	18%	20%	19%	13%
Very Poor	21%	22%	21%	23%	18%	20%	9%	15%	23%	21%	33%	24%
Don't know / not sure	26%	20%	32%	26%	25%	25%	38%	22%	25%	26%	17%	39%

The standard of river management by government agencies

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>LNP</i>	<i>ALP</i>	<i>GRN</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Total Good	14%	16%	13%	16%	16%	11%	18%	18%	14%	14%	12%	12%
Total Poor	48%	51%	45%	50%	44%	53%	31%	47%	48%	51%	55%	46%
Very good	4%	4%	3%	3%	5%	3%	5%	4%	3%	5%	1%	3%
Good	11%	11%	10%	12%	11%	8%	13%	13%	10%	9%	11%	9%
Neutral	16%	17%	15%	16%	16%	15%	24%	18%	17%	16%	17%	11%
Poor	21%	24%	19%	20%	21%	26%	17%	28%	21%	19%	13%	15%
Very Poor	27%	27%	26%	30%	23%	27%	14%	19%	27%	31%	42%	31%
Don't know / not sure	21%	15%	27%	19%	24%	20%	27%	18%	22%	19%	16%	31%

The enforcement of rules, like preventing and punishing water theft

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>LNP</i>	<i>ALP</i>	<i>GRN</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Total Good	23%	25%	22%	25%	25%	20%	25%	26%	23%	21%	25%	20%
Total Poor	38%	42%	34%	41%	37%	38%	20%	35%	40%	42%	39%	35%
Very good	7%	8%	7%	6%	10%	5%	8%	10%	6%	6%	10%	6%
Good	16%	17%	15%	19%	16%	15%	17%	16%	18%	16%	15%	14%
Neutral	15%	16%	15%	13%	14%	17%	22%	18%	15%	14%	14%	12%
Poor	16%	18%	13%	16%	17%	16%	10%	20%	16%	13%	14%	10%
Very Poor	22%	24%	21%	25%	20%	22%	10%	15%	24%	29%	25%	25%
Don't know / not sure	23%	17%	30%	21%	24%	24%	33%	21%	21%	23%	21%	33%

The future health of the river system under current management

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>NSW</i>	<i>Vic</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>LNP</i>	<i>ALP</i>	<i>GRN</i>	<i>PHON</i>	<i>Other</i>
Total Good	14%	16%	11%	15%	17%	10%	13%	17%	15%	13%	6%	9%
Total Poor	49%	52%	46%	51%	45%	52%	33%	47%	47%	58%	59%	49%
Very good	4%	5%	3%	4%	5%	3%	5%	4%	3%	6%	1%	3%
Good	10%	11%	9%	11%	12%	7%	8%	13%	11%	6%	5%	6%
Neutral	16%	16%	17%	15%	16%	16%	28%	19%	17%	12%	18%	12%
Poor	22%	26%	18%	22%	21%	25%	20%	27%	20%	23%	22%	18%
Very Poor	27%	26%	28%	29%	23%	27%	12%	20%	27%	35%	37%	31%
Don't know / not sure	21%	16%	26%	19%	23%	22%	26%	17%	22%	18%	17%	29%

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

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other
Yes	42%	47%	37%	45%	37%	45%	27%	43%	40%	44%	49%	39%
No	45%	39%	51%	43%	49%	43%	61%	46%	47%	46%	36%	43%
Don't know / not sure	13%	13%	13%	13%	14%	12%	12%	11%	13%	10%	14%	18%

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

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other
Yes	64%	68%	61%	72%	60%	63%	45%	69%	60%	60%	72%	64%
No	29%	26%	31%	23%	31%	33%	45%	27%	33%	36%	21%	24%
Don't know / not sure	7%	6%	7%	5%	10%	4%	10%	5%	7%	4%	6%	12%

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

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other
Yes	30%	34%	26%	34%	26%	27%	18%	30%	30%	35%	27%	28%
No	57%	55%	60%	55%	60%	61%	66%	60%	57%	57%	58%	52%
Don't know / not sure	13%	11%	14%	11%	14%	12%	16%	10%	13%	8%	15%	19%

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

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other
Yes	65%	65%	65%	68%	64%	65%	57%	60%	67%	70%	72%	63%
No	11%	15%	8%	11%	13%	11%	12%	15%	10%	10%	6%	11%
Don't know / not sure	24%	21%	27%	20%	24%	25%	31%	25%	23%	19%	21%	26%

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?

	Total	Male	Female	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	LNP	ALP	GRN	PHON	Other
Yes	12%	14%	10%	15%	9%	11%	12%	14%	11%	11%	12%	9%
No	69%	67%	70%	67%	68%	71%	63%	64%	70%	72%	74%	70%
Don't know / not sure	20%	19%	21%	17%	22%	18%	25%	22%	19%	17%	14%	21%