

Polling - Northern NSW rescue helicopter

October 2024

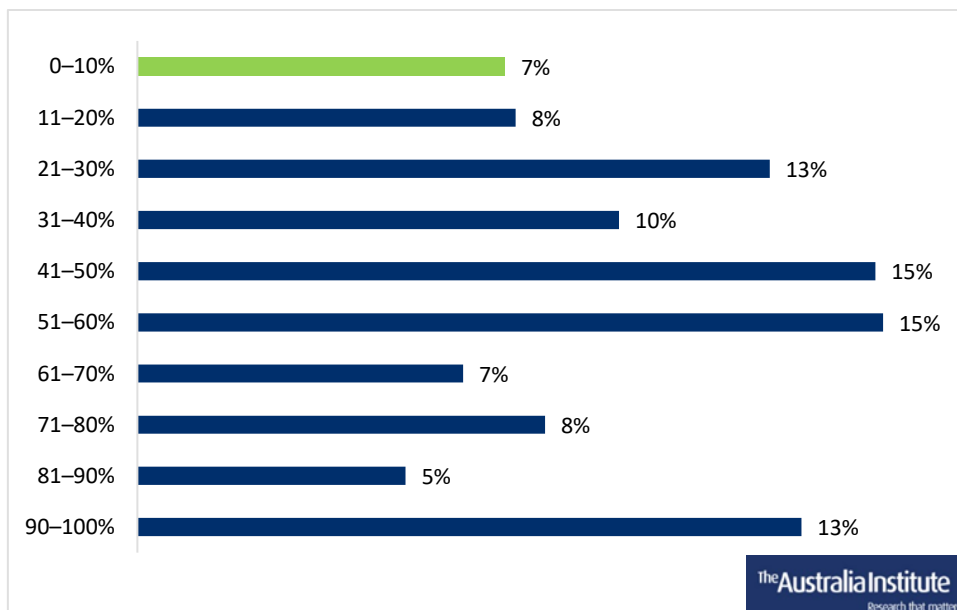
Key results

The Australia Institute surveyed a representative sample of 800 NSW residents to test their knowledge about how much Westpac contributes to the running cost of the Northern NSW Rescue Helicopter, also known as the Westpac Rescue Helicopter. Although Westpac is the naming rights sponsor of the rescue helicopter, Westpac provides less than 10% of its total funding.

The results show that:

- Only 7% of residents in NSW correctly identified less than 10% as the amount Westpac contributes to the running of the rescue helicopter.
- 93% thought it was higher, including almost half of NSW residents (48%) who thought Westpac contributed half or more of the cost of running the rescue helicopter.

Figure 1: Westpac funding contribution to rescue helicopter



Note: Correct response highlighted in green.

The Westpac Rescue Helicopter is the trading name of the Northern NSW Helicopter Rescue Service, an aeromedical operation that serves 1.5 million people from bases in Newcastle, Tamworth and Lismore. The service was founded in 1975 as the Wales Rescue Helicopter, but when major sponsor the Bank of New South Wales changed its name to Westpac in 1982, the rescue service adopted its current name.¹

Although Westpac is the naming rights sponsor of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, it provides a small minority of total funding.

Westpac also sponsors the Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service in Sydney and Moruya,² and other rescue helicopters around Australia. Westpac refers to these collectively as the Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service,³ and its sponsorship features prominently in the bank's promotion – including in the early pages of its annual report.⁴

According to disclosures to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), in 2023 the Westpac Rescue Helicopter (the Northern NSW Rescue Helicopter) had revenue of \$57 million, of which \$39 million was payment for services (presumably from the NSW Government for aeromedical operations).⁵

The rescue service received \$17.4 million in “other revenue,” including \$3.8 million in sponsorships, \$2.5 million from workplace giving, \$6.0 million in donations, \$3.4 million from special events and \$0.7 million from retail fundraising. The rescue service also made \$1.1 million from Cash Housie, which is gambling for cash prizes in a bingo-like game hosted in registered clubs across Northern NSW.⁶

In total, the \$3.8 million in sponsorships – which are not Westpac's alone – account for just 7% of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter's revenue. This is about the same amount as workplace giving and Cash Housie contributed.

While Westpac is the naming rights sponsor, the rescue helicopter also has seven multi-region “logo rights partners”, and the three regions have between seven and 15 logo rights partners each. There are another 11 community partners that provide

¹ Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service (n.d.) *History*, <https://rescuehelicopter.com.au/who-we-are/history/>

² Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter (n.d.) *About us*, <https://lifesaver.org.au/about-us/>

³ Westpac (n.d.) *Westpac Lifesaver Rescue Helicopter Service*, <https://www.westpac.com.au/help/community/rescue/rescue-helicopters/>

⁴ Westpac (2024) *2024 annual report*, p. 10, <https://www.westpac.com.au/about-westpac/investor-centre/financial-information/annual-reports/>

⁵ Northern NSW Helicopter Rescue Service Ltd (2023) *2023 annual report*, p. 25, <https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/charities/fc98c2b2-3aaf-e811-a961-000d3ad24182/documents/>

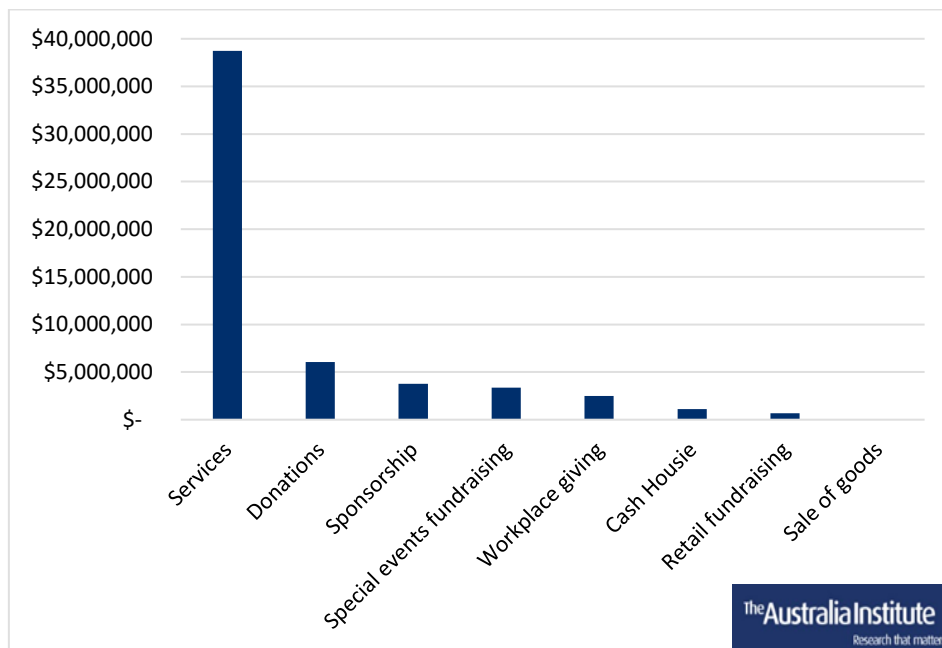
⁶ Northern NSW Helicopter Rescue Service Ltd (2023) *2023 annual report*, p. 38; Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service (n.d.) *Helicopter Housie*, <https://rescuehelicopter.com.au/you-can-help/housie/>

funds for specific projects.⁷ This is on top of grants supports from local councils, philanthropic trusts, foundations, licensed clubs and government departments.⁸

Unfortunately, neither the NSW Government nor Westpac are forthcoming about how much Westpac actually contributes to the rescue helicopter that bears its name.

The contribution from NSW taxpayers to the Northern NSW rescue helicopter is about ten times larger than all sponsors combined (Figure 2). Australia Institute polling research shows that this reality is not well understood among residents of NSW.

Figure 2: Westpac Rescue Helicopter revenue, 2023



Source: Northern NSW Helicopter Rescue Service Ltd (2023) *2023 annual report*, pp. 25, 38, <https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/charities/fc98c2b2-3aaf-e811-a961-000d3ad24182/documents/>

⁷ Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service (n.d.) *Business partners*, <https://rescuehelicopter.com.au/who-we-are/partners/>

⁸ Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service (n.d.) *Grants support*, <https://rescuehelicopter.com.au/who-we-are/partners/grants-support/>

Method

Short disclosure statement

Panel provider	Dynata
Research company	The Australia Institute
Client commissioning the research	NA
Fieldwork dates	06 September 2024 to 10 September 2024
Mode of data collection	Online recruited from research panel
Target population	NSW adults aged 18+
Sample size	800
Australian Polling Council compliant	Yes
Voting intention published	No
Long disclosure statement	See below

Long disclosure statement

Effective sample size after weighting applied	799.01
Margin of error associated with effective sample size	±3.4%
Variables used in weighting	Age and gender based on Australian Bureau of Statistics “National, state and territory population” data
Gender identity categorisation	Those who answered the gender identity question as “Non-binary”, “I use a different term”, or “Prefer not to answer” had their responses included with females for the purpose of reporting, due to constraints from weighting data availability
Weighting method used	Raking method
Full question text, responses categories and randomisation	See below
Source of online sample	Dynata’s online panel
Positioning of voting intention questions in questionnaire	Immediately after demographics, before policy questions
How were undecided voters handled?	Respondents who answered “Don’t know / Not sure” for voting intention were then asked a leaning question; these leanings are included in voting intention crosstabs
Method of calculating 2PP	NA
Voting intention categorisation	Voting crosstabs show voting intentions for the House of Representatives. “Coalition” includes separate responses for Liberal and National. “Other” refers to Independent/Other, and minor parties in cases where they were included in the voting intention but represent too small a sample to be reported separately in the crosstabs
Location results	Results are shown only for larger states



**Australian
Polling Council
Quality Mark**

Detailed results

No preceding questions in the poll are expected to have influenced the results of the questions published here.

This is a photo of the Northern NSW Rescue Helicopter, also known as the Westpac Rescue Helicopter. Image source: <https://rescuehelicopter.com.au/media/>

How much of the cost of running the rescue helicopter do you think Westpac contributes? Please give your best estimate

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>Coalition</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>One Nation</i>	<i>Other</i>
0–10%	7%	10%	5%	8%	6%	10%	3%	9%
11–20%	8%	9%	6%	6%	9%	8%	12%	6%
21–30%	13%	12%	13%	13%	12%	20%	5%	8%
31–40%	10%	7%	12%	11%	8%	12%	10%	7%
41–50%	15%	17%	13%	14%	17%	10%	15%	17%
51–60%	15%	13%	17%	15%	14%	15%	14%	18%
61–70%	7%	7%	6%	6%	8%	9%	5%	3%
71–80%	8%	7%	9%	9%	8%	6%	15%	6%
81–90%	5%	4%	7%	5%	5%	2%	7%	10%
90–100%	13%	14%	13%	13%	15%	8%	14%	14%

	<i>Total</i>	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
0–10%	7%	6%	6%	14%	10%	5%
11–20%	8%	14%	8%	8%	2%	5%
21–30%	13%	22%	19%	6%	13%	5%
31–40%	10%	15%	12%	8%	10%	5%
41–50%	15%	12%	16%	17%	11%	17%
51–60%	15%	12%	12%	16%	15%	18%
61–70%	7%	6%	6%	8%	6%	7%
71–80%	8%	6%	6%	8%	10%	11%
81–90%	5%	4%	6%	4%	8%	6%
90–100%	13%	4%	9%	14%	16%	21%