



UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA



WELLBEING, RESILIENCE AND LIVEABILITY IN THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN

Finding of the 2022-23 Regional Wellbeing Survey

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DISTINCTIVE BY DESIGN

HEALTH

canberra.edu.au/health



Australian Treasury framework launched July 2023

Inclusion, fairness and equity

Overall life satisfaction

Healthy

Healthy throughout life

- Life expectancy
- Mental health
- Prevalence of chronic conditions

Equitable access to quality health and care services

- Access to health services
- Access to care and support services

Secure

Living peacefully and feeling safe

- Feeling of safety
- Experience of violence
- Childhood experience of abuse
- Online safety
- National safety
- Access to justice

Having financial security and access to housing

- Making ends meet
- Homelessness
- Housing serviceability

Sustainable

Protect, repair and manage the environment

- Emissions reduction
- Air quality
- Protected areas
- Biological diversity
- Resource use and waste generation

Resilient and sustainable nation

- Fiscal sustainability
- Economic resilience
- Climate resilience

Cohesive

Having time for family and community

- Time for recreation and social interaction
- Social connections
- Creative and cultural engagement

Valuing diversity, belonging and culture

- Experience of discrimination
- Acceptance of diversity
- First Nations languages spoken
- Sense of belonging

Trust in institutions

- Trust in others
- Trust in key institutions
- Trust in Australian public services
- Trust in national government
- Representation in parliament

Prosperous

Dynamic economy that shares prosperity

- National income per capita
- Productivity
- Household income and wealth
- Income and wealth inequality
- Innovation

Access to education, skills development and learning throughout life

- Childhood development
- Literacy and numeracy skills at school
- Education attainment
- Skills development
- Digital preparedness

Broad opportunities for employment and well-paid, secure jobs

- Wages
- Job opportunities
- Broadening access to work
- Job satisfaction
- Secure jobs

Measuring what matters first dashboard highlights our lack of data for regional communities



Cheap shots aside, Chalmers has work to do to improve his new 'wellbeing' framework

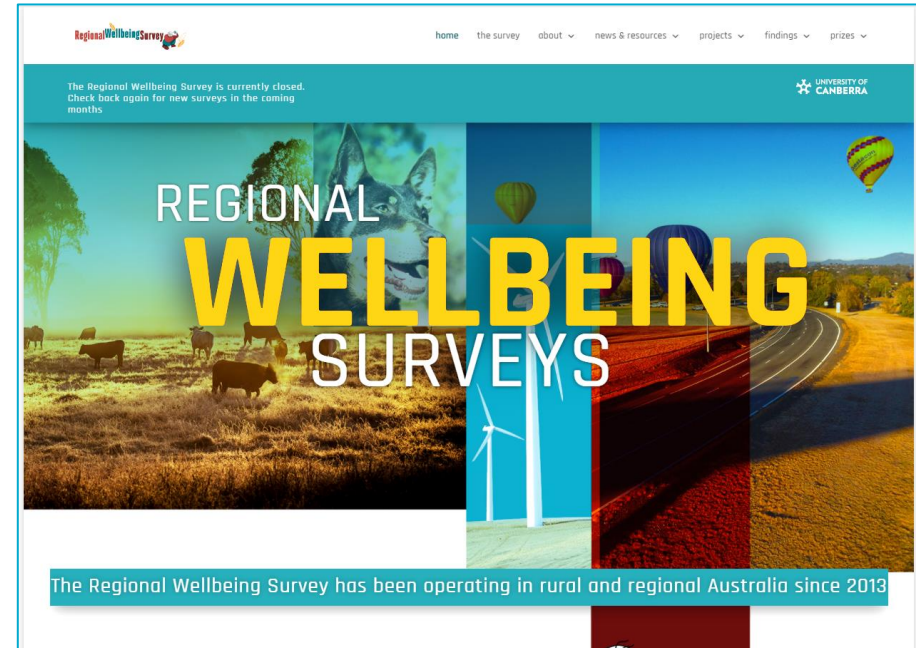
Published: July 21, 2023 4:51pm AEST

Lukas Coch/AAP

<https://theconversation.com/cheap-shots-aside-chalmers-has-work-to-do-to-improve-his-new-wellbeing-framework-207324>

Regional Wellbeing Survey

- Survey of Australians living in urban, regional and rural areas
- Growing number of participants – from 9,000 in 2013, to 15,000 annually
- Large sample of Basin residents each year (between 4,000 and 6,500)
- Many questions about water reform over the years – and many reports



Information, reports, findings available at
www.regionalwellbeing.org.au

Wellbeing, resilience and liveability

About the RWS

Multiple reports examining wellbeing, resilience, liveability

Current projects examining cumulative disaster impact, response and recovery; agricultural WHS; wellbeing indicators for agriculture; resilience indicators; and factors protecting wellbeing during periods of high stress

Thriving, surviving, or declining communities: socio-economic change in Murray-Darling Basin communities

March 2020



Jacki Schirmer^{1,2} and Melinda Myles^{1,2}

¹ Health Research Institute, University of Canberra
² Centre for Applied Water Science, Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra
GIS mapping produced by Dominic Peet.

This investigation has been commissioned by the Panel for the Independent Assessment of Social and Economic Conditions in the Murray-Darling Basin, as part of the terms of reference of its commission.

Published 15, 2020, 10:00 AM
https://www.regionallwellbeing.org.au/



Original Contribution

Drought and Distress in Southeastern Australia

Jack C. Hainigan^{1,2}, Jacki Schirmer^{1,2} and Thoralf Nissenberg¹

¹Centre for Research and Action in Public Health, University of Canberra, Building 22, Brwa, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia
²University Centre for Rural Health, School of Public Health, University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, Australia
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2019.12.001

Abstract: Drought may increase the risk of several health problems, but evidence suggests a complex interplay with other groups being vulnerable while others are not. Previous studies from Australia have found associations with mental health, depression and distress that vary by age, gender and socioeconomic. Understanding the effects of drought on mental health is important because drought is predicted to become common in some areas in the future. We investigated the associations between drought and distress in a series of rural Australian by age, gender and farming status. The cultural domain data using a survey of 1012 people from across the state of Victoria, Australia, in 2013. Respondents completed the Kessler 10 (K10) Psychological Distress Index, and demographic and general health data were collected. We tested a chronic drought index in the context of indicators of engagement. Association between distress and drought were mediated using multivariate regression models with interactions by age, gender and farming occupation. Parts of Victoria were in drought in 2013. Drought duration was associated with higher distress to manage most mental health risk with males more so. A 1.0 year more severe drought increase in drought duration had no effect on mental health. This pattern did not vary between farmers and non-farmers. Though not associated with increased distress, but did interact between colleagues. Our results suggest that supporting stronger networks may be particularly important, and understanding how risk reduction and response may enable us to build adaptive capacity and resilience.

Keywords: Drought, Australia, Chronic Disease, Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

Drought has been suggested to increase both physical and mental health problems through a range of possible pathways (Hendle et al., 2013; Viner et al., 2015). Throughout history, droughts have caused significant disruptions to

communities worldwide, contributing to the decline of civilisations (St. Michael 2017) and the recent civil war in Syria (Keller et al., 2015). At an individual level, droughts have been associated with increased risk of suicide in Australia (not even Utzinger et al., 2012) and distress in residents from rural Australian communities (Paton et al.,

Health and safety in Victoria's agricultural workforce

Findings from the 2020 Regional Wellbeing Survey

January 2022



Jacki Schirmer^{1,2}

¹Health Research Institute, University of Canberra
²Centre for Change Governance, University of Canberra

Supporting drought affected farmers and communities: Learning from those experiencing drought

Brief Report #1 from the 2018 Regional Wellbeing Survey



October 2019

Jacki Schirmer^{1,2} and Kimberly Brown¹

¹Health Research Institute, University of Canberra
²Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra

Growing resilience to drought: Natural resource management as a resilience intervention

Report prepared for NRM Regions



October 2018

Kimberly Brown¹ & Jacki Schirmer^{1,2}

¹Health Research Institute & ²Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra

NRM REGIONAL WELLBEING SURVEY

THE 2015 REGIONAL WELLBEING SURVEY WELLBEING, RESILIENCE AND LIVEABILITY IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

JUNE 2016



Access reports at <https://www.regionallwellbeing.org.au/reports-to-date/>

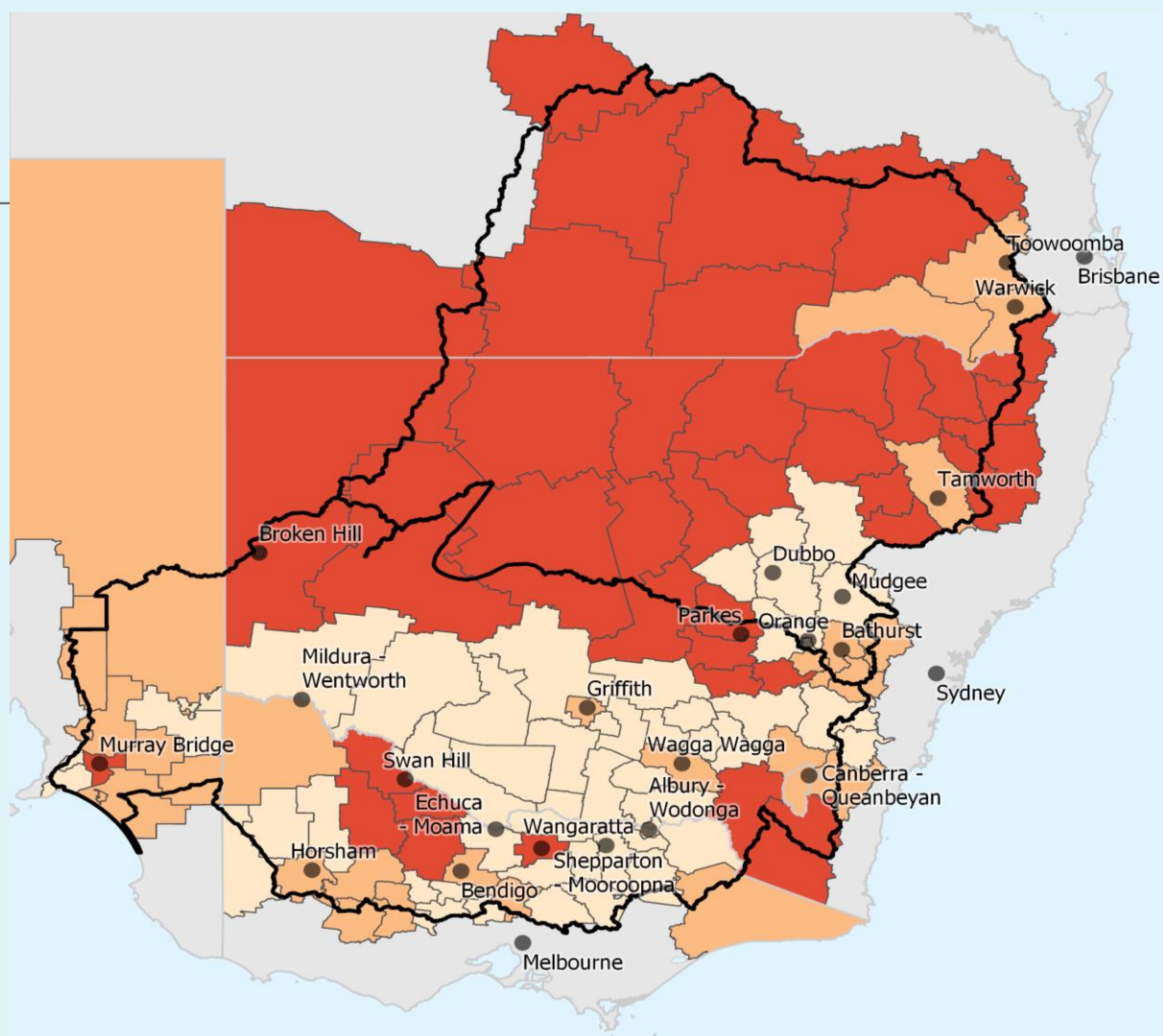
Sefton's report – Overall community wellbeing

Self-rating of

- how well community deals with challenges
- if it has a bright future
- if people want to shift
- if they would recommend their community to others as a good place to live

Overall community wellbeing

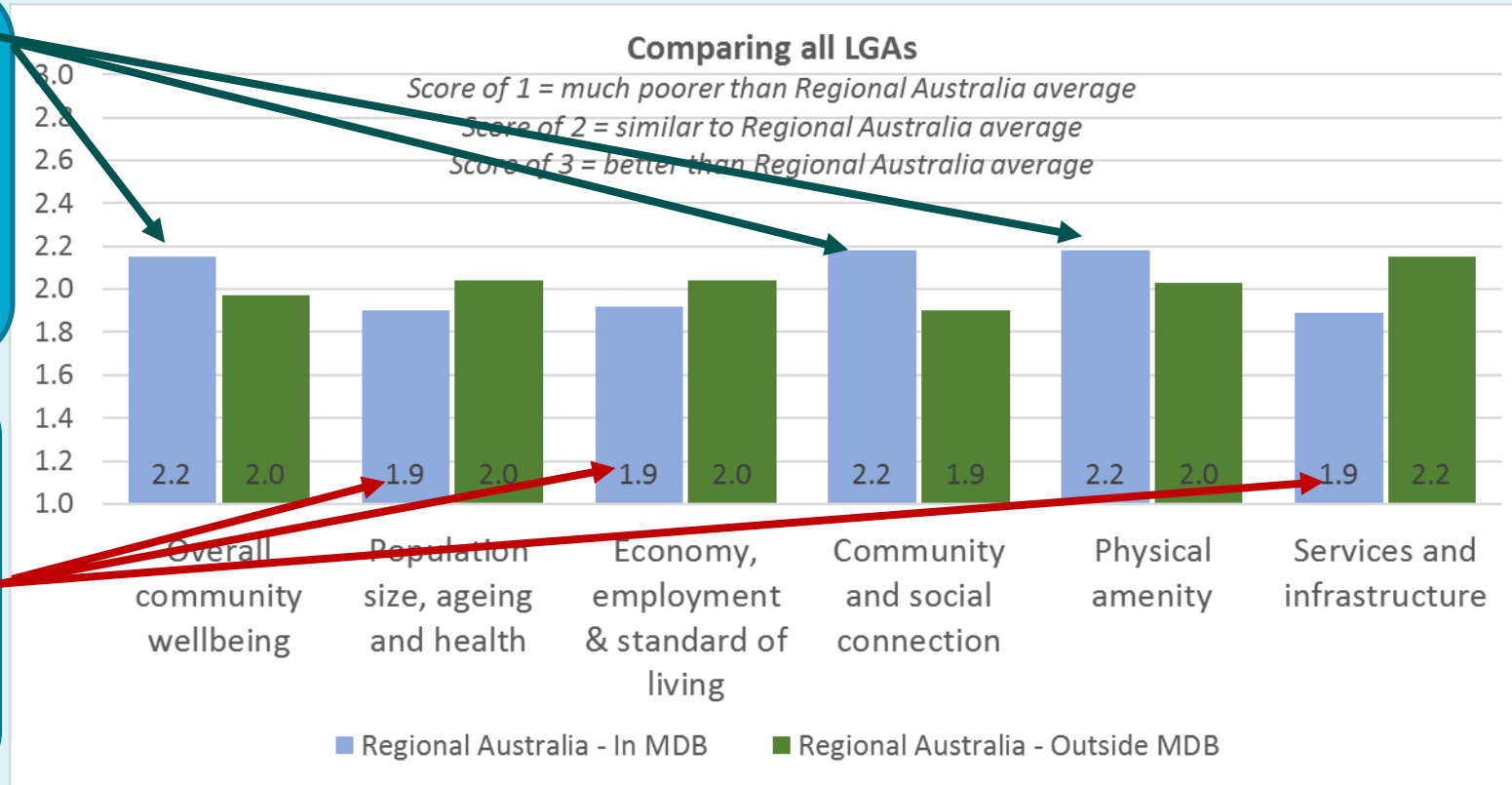
- 1.0 - 1.9 Low score (lower than Regional Australia average)
- 2.0 - 2.4 Average score (similar to Regional Australia average)
- 2.5 - 3.0 High score (higher than Regional Australia average)
- State borders
- Northern / Southern Basin boundary
- Cities



Basin communities on average doing better on some fronts (community spirit, amenity), worse on others (economy, services, infrastructure, population change)

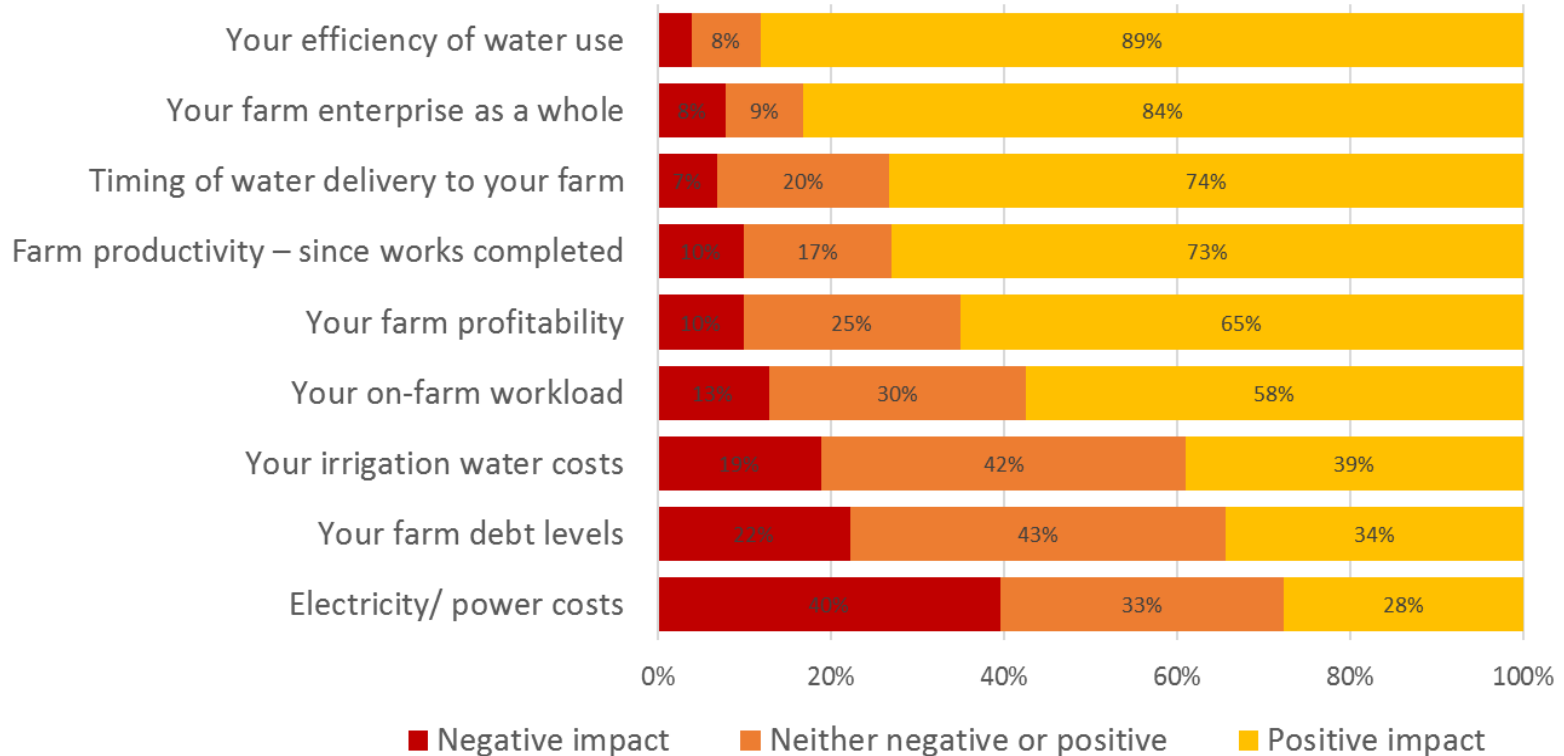
Higher
community
wellbeing,
social
connection,
amenity

Poorer
economy,
services,
infrastructure,
and
population
change



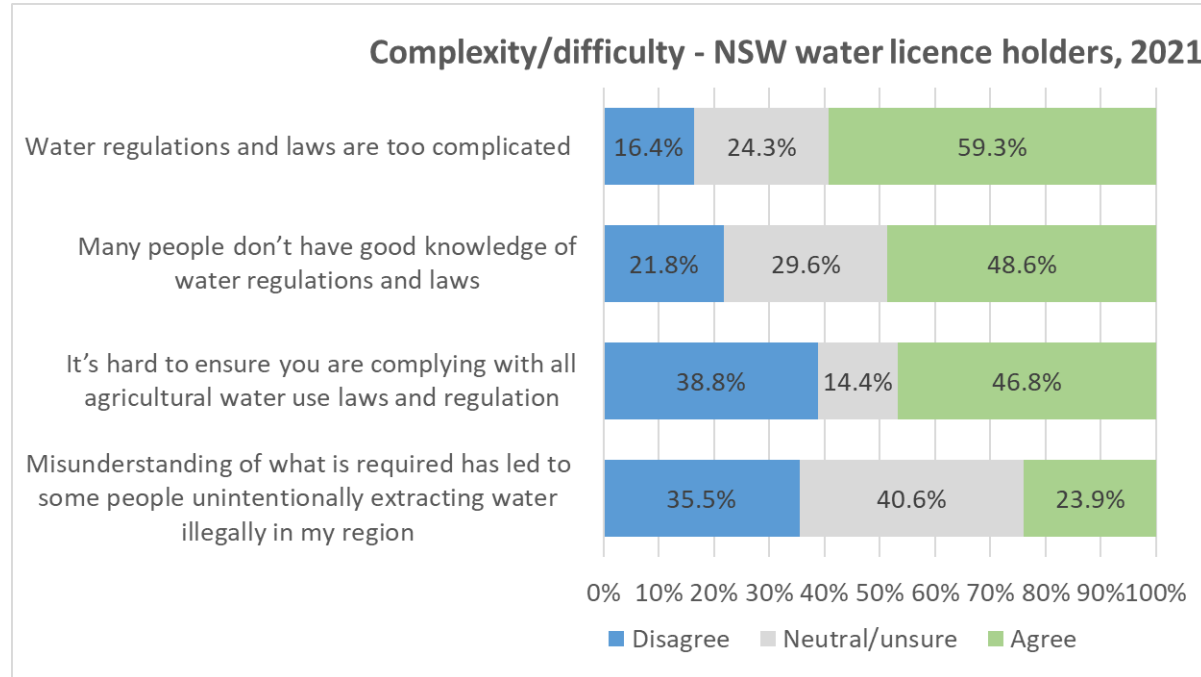
Example: impacts of on- and off-farm irrigation infrastructure modernisation

Irrigator views about impacts of on-farm modernisation (those who modernised with grant, 2018)

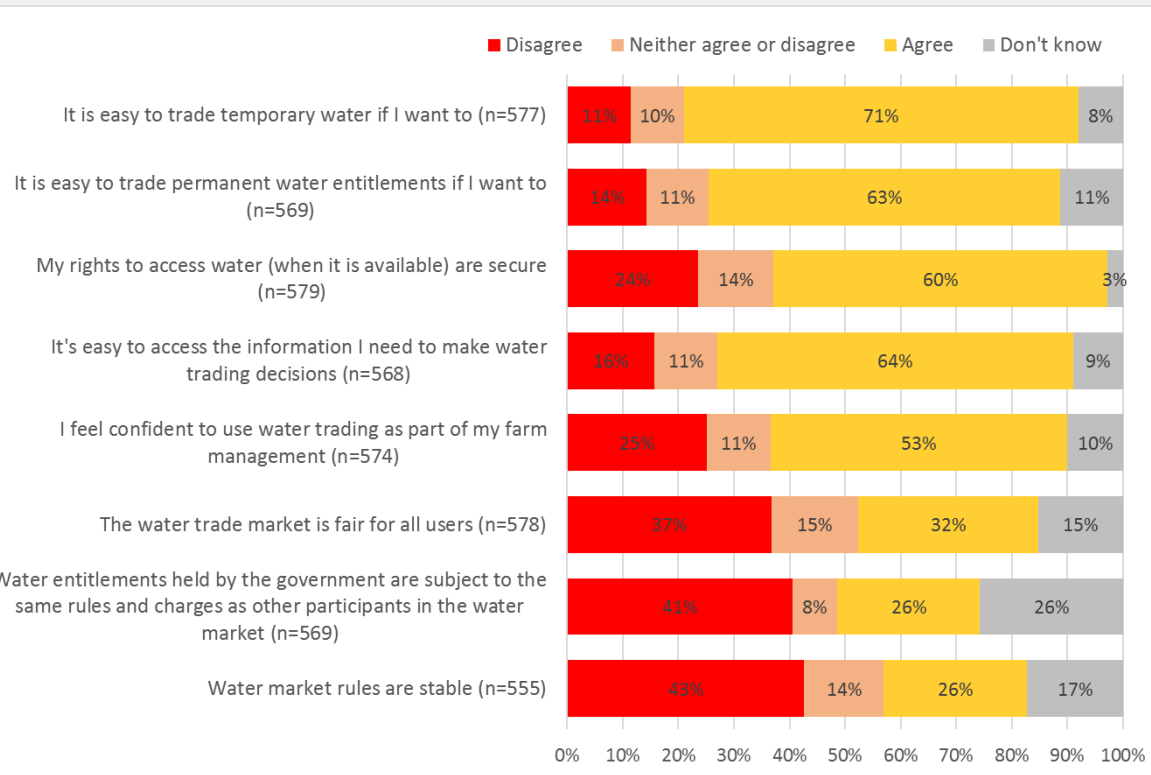


Example: asking NSW water licence holders views about complexity of water regulation (2021)

However, few believe this complexity leads to unintentional illegal extraction of water.



Example: ACCC water market inquiry – views of irrigators about water trading & markets



Most agreed that

- Easy to trade water
- Easy to access information
- Rights to water are secure
- Confident to use water trading

More disagreed than agreed that:

- Water market is fair for all
- Government subject to same rules as other water users
- Water market rules are stable

Regional Wellbeing Survey – 2022-23

What is critical to wellbeing, liveability and resilience?

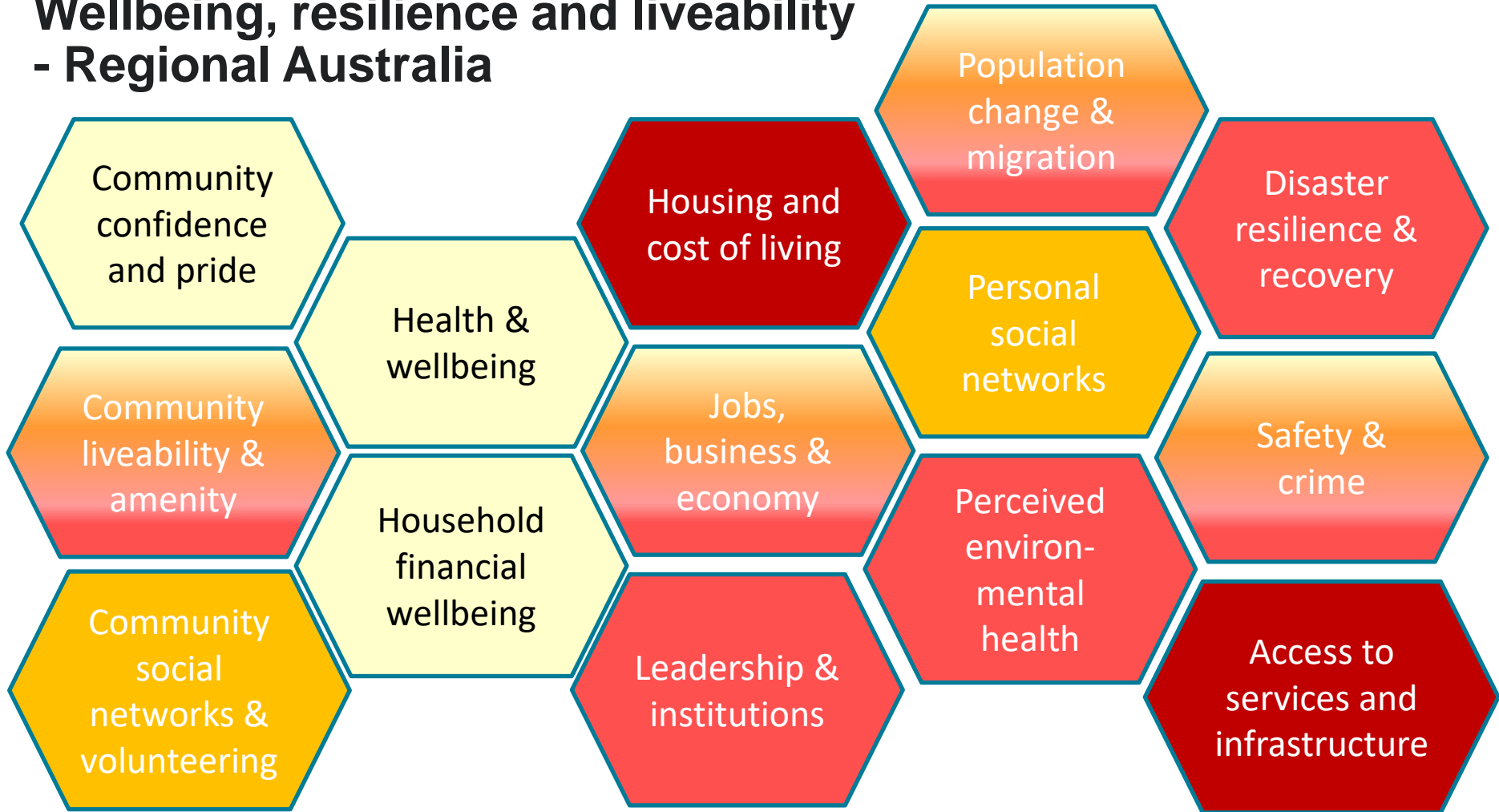
We need a good understanding of this to be able to navigate the impacts of challenges – from COVID-19 to 2021 and 2022 floods to changing water reform settings.

Data collected April-June 2023

Sample size:

- Australia: 16,243
- Regional Australia: 11,489
- Murray-Darling Basin: 4,983

Wellbeing, resilience and liveability - Regional Australia

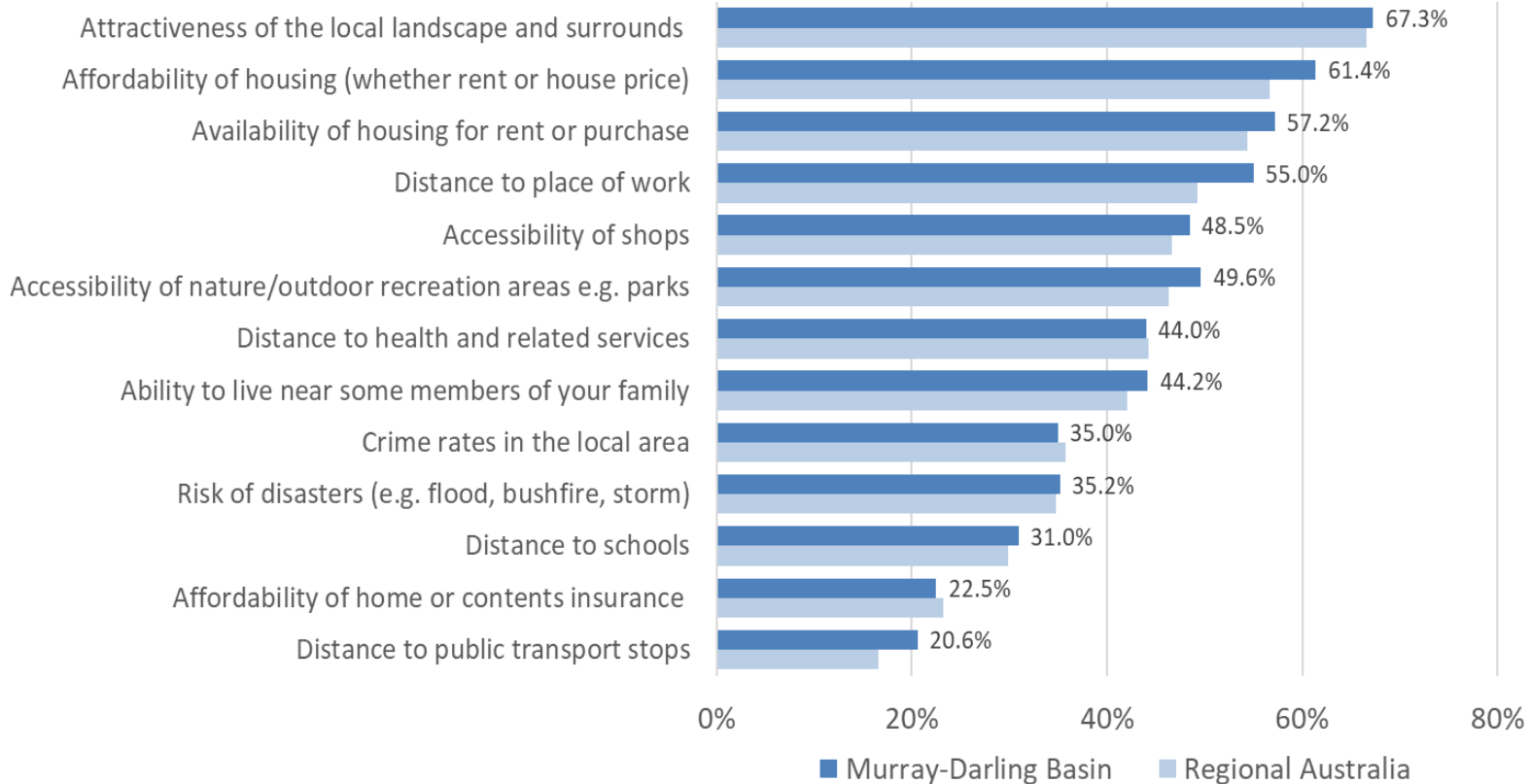


What's happening in Murray-Darling Basin communities?

1. Liveability and wellbeing
2. Confidence in the future
3. Drought and disaster resilience & recovery

What makes a community liveable?

What influences the type of community/location a person chooses to live in?



Amenity

Housing

Jobs

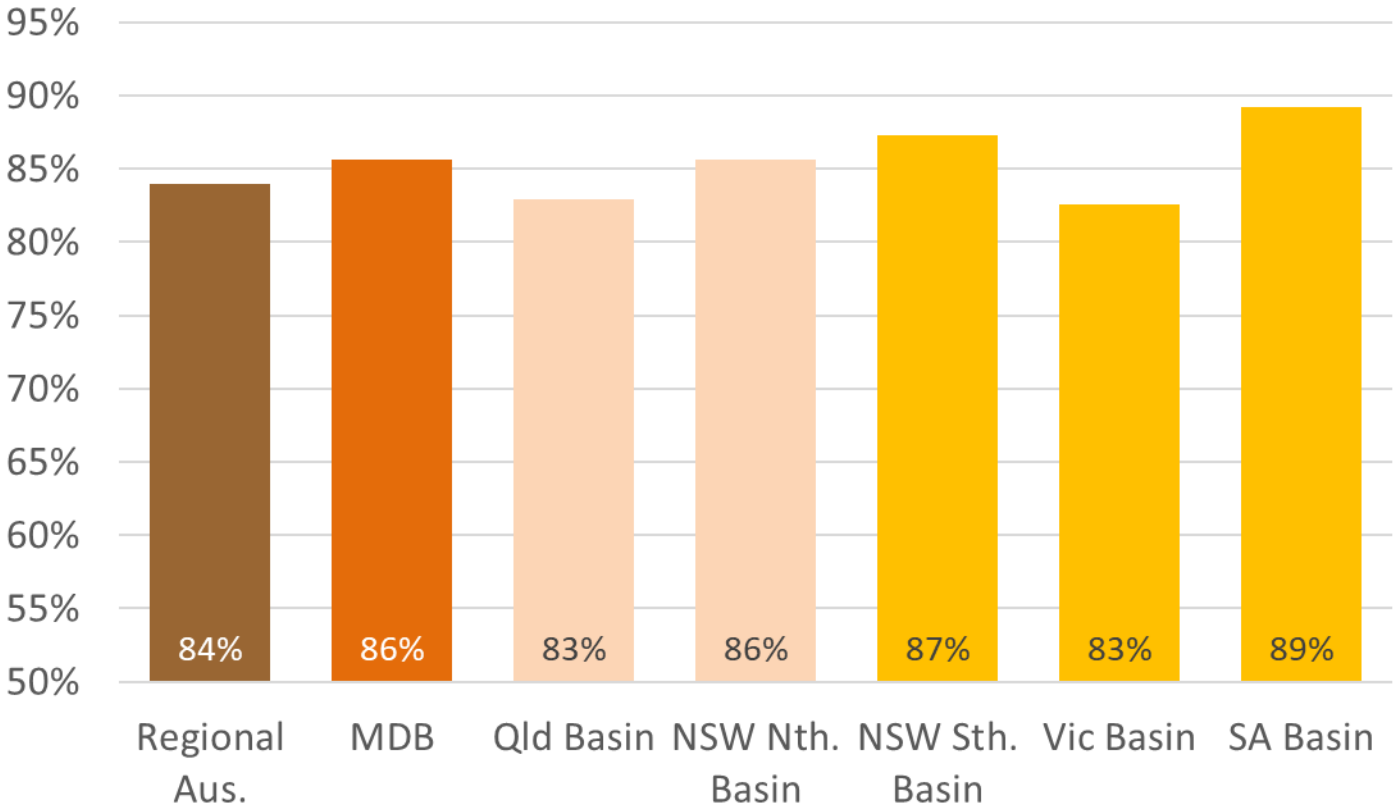
Shops

Services

Safety

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin

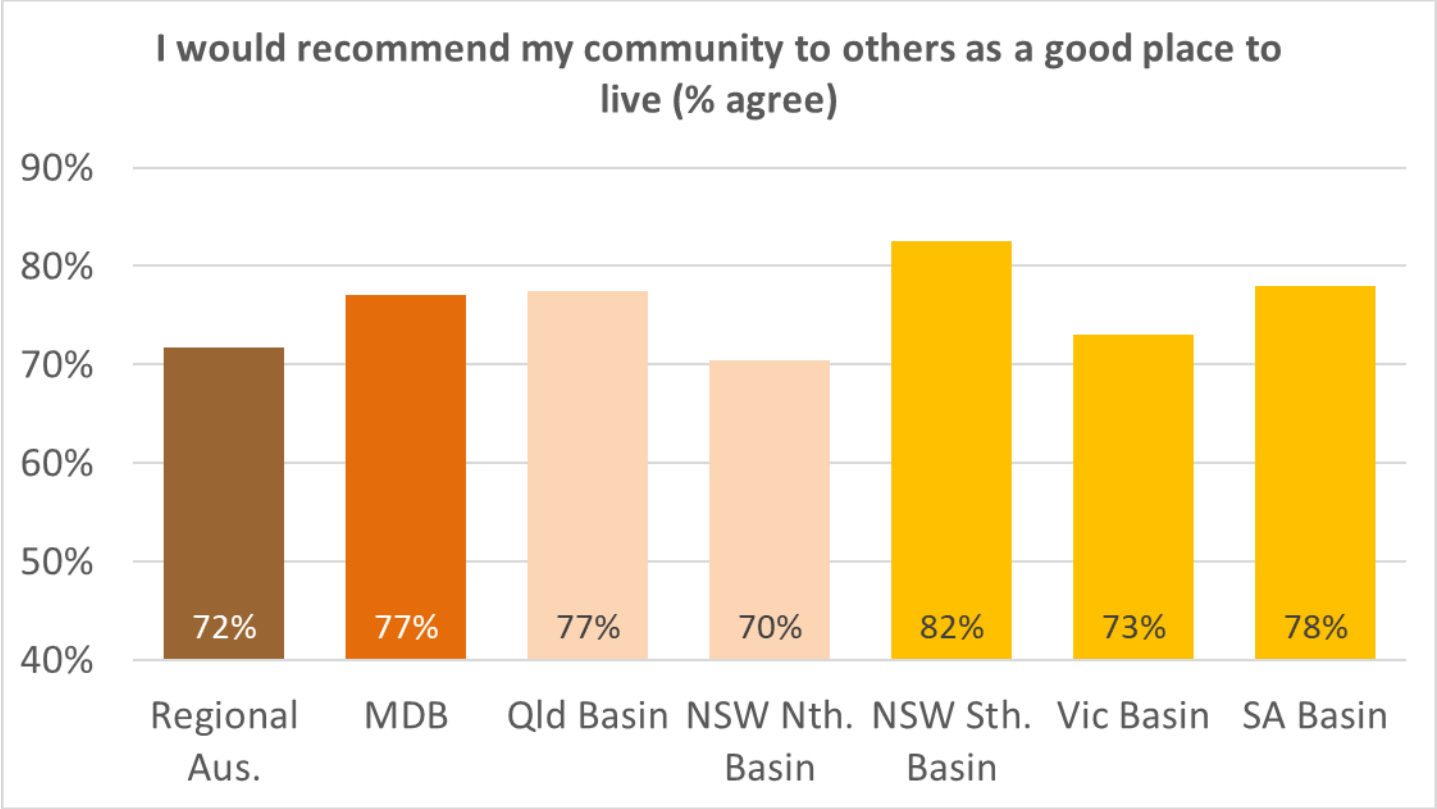
My community is a great place to live (% agree)



Most Basin communities continue to be viewed as great places to live.

There are exceptions – usually where there are fewer jobs and lower safety.

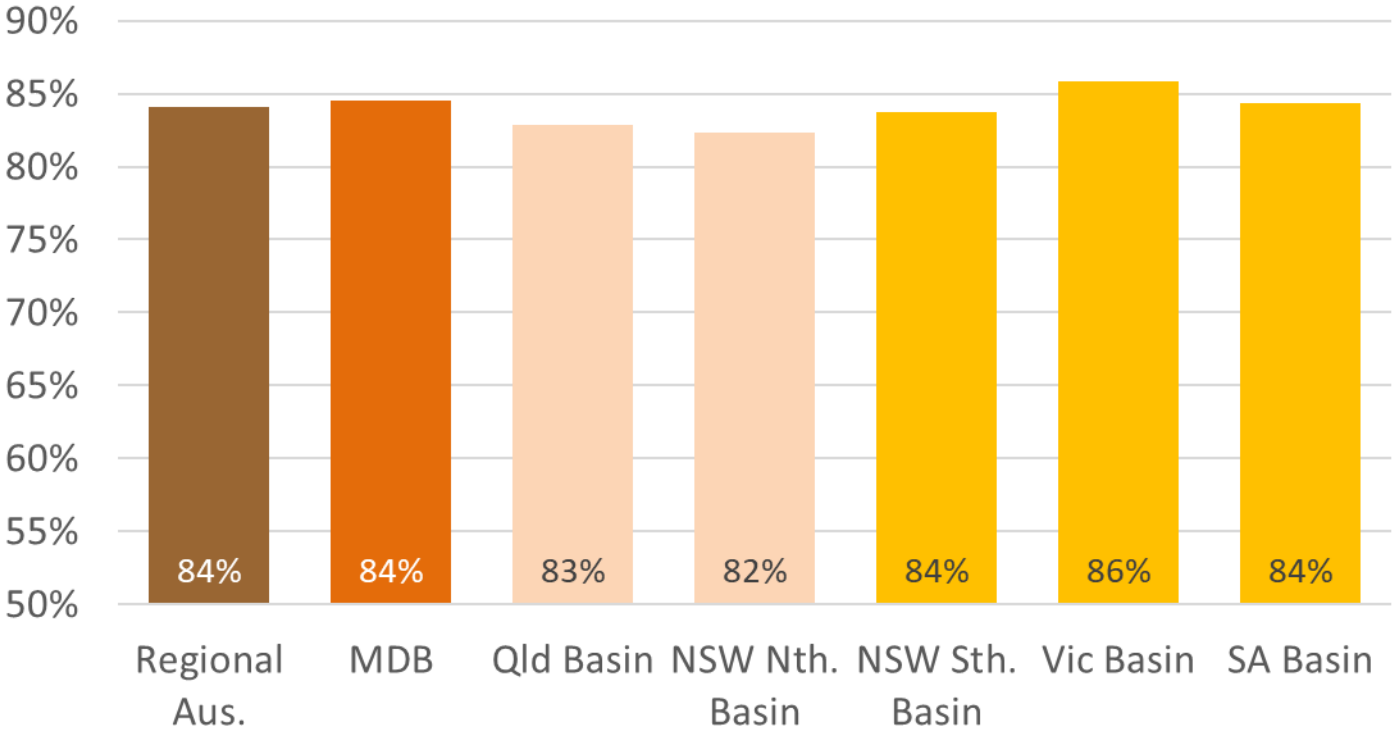
Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



There's varying confidence in recommending communities to others as good places to live

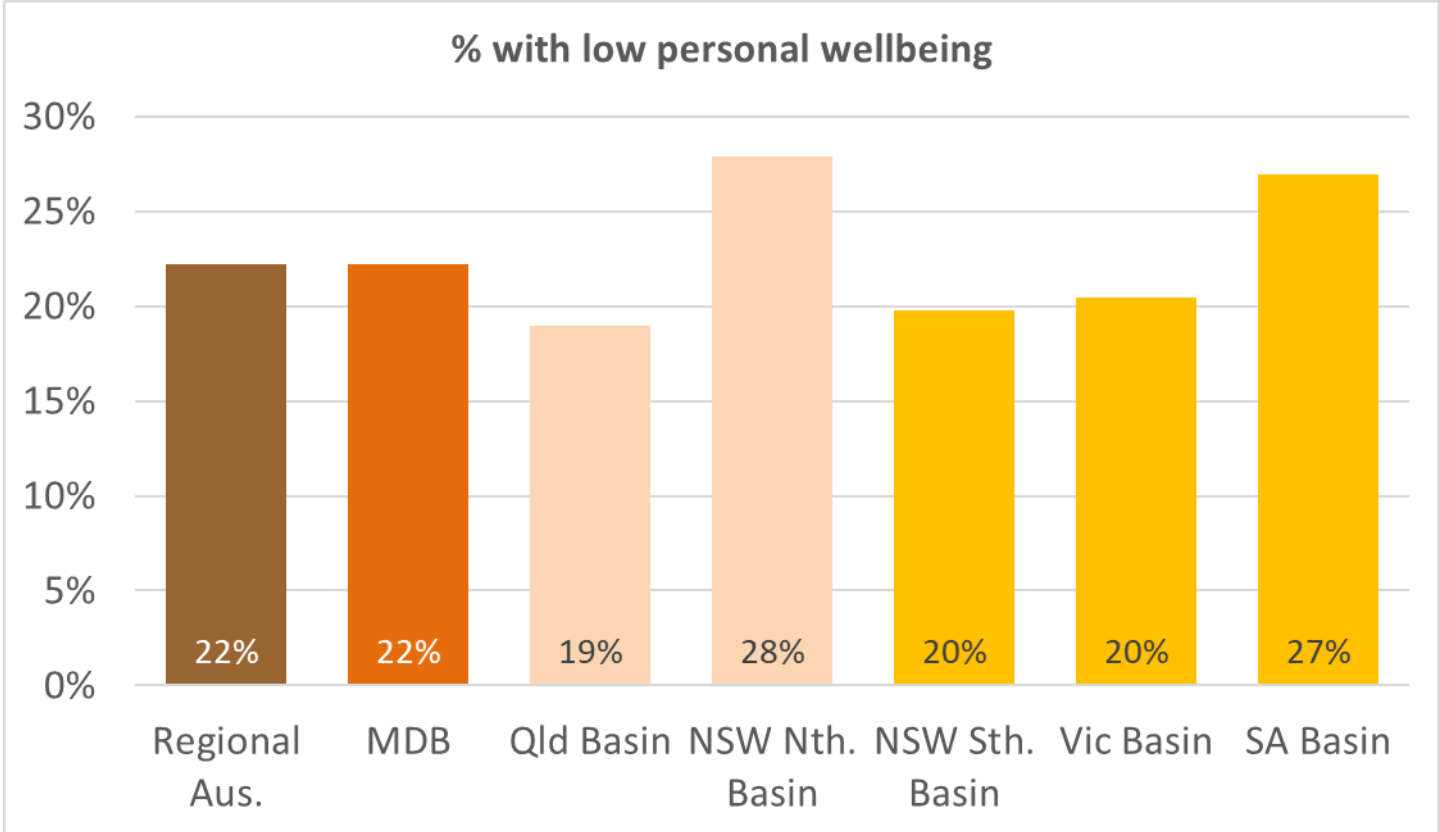
Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin

There are attractive natural places in my community e.g. parks
(% agree)



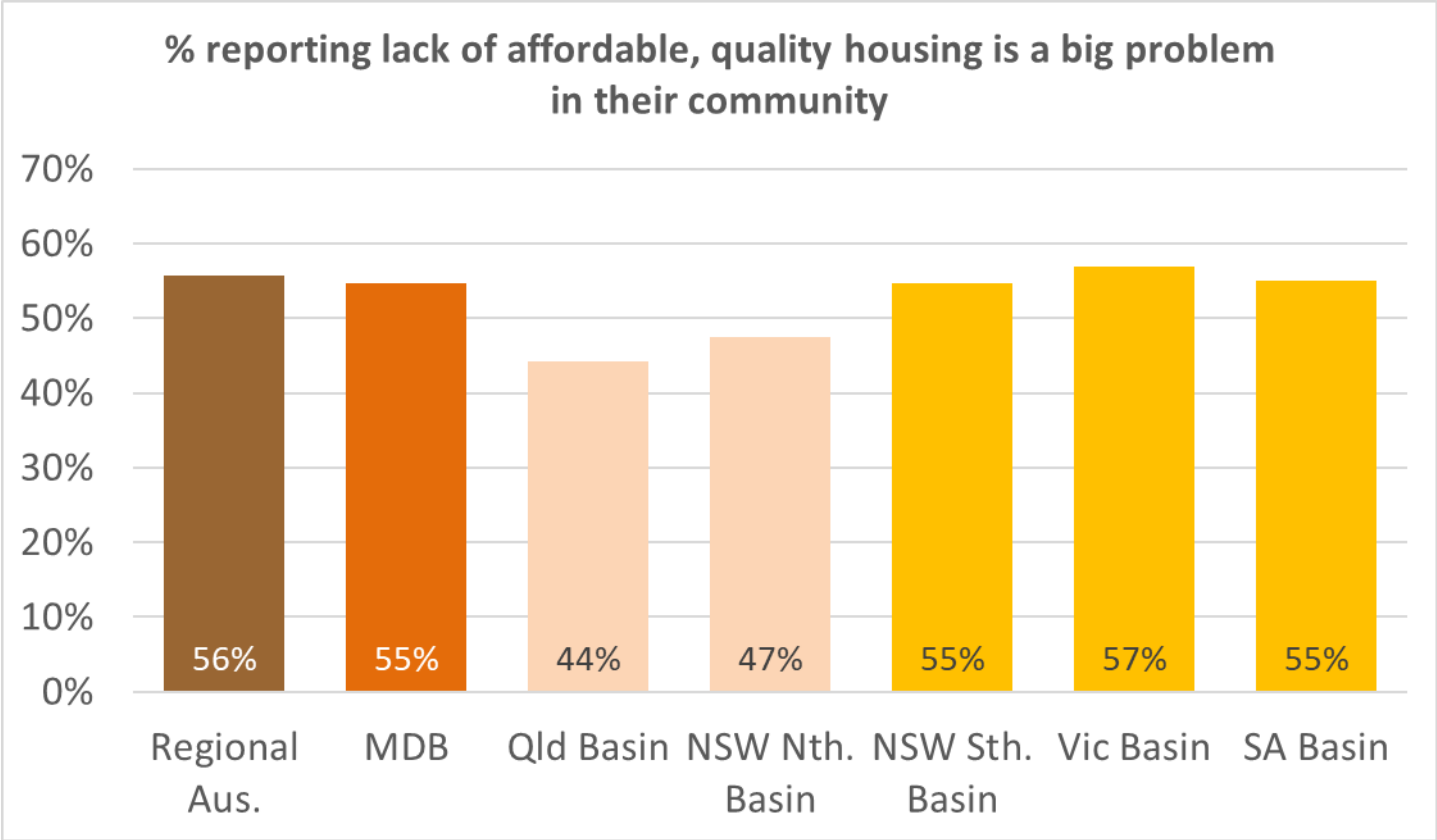
Regional communities are proud of the nature areas in their communities – although many hold concerns about health of those areas.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



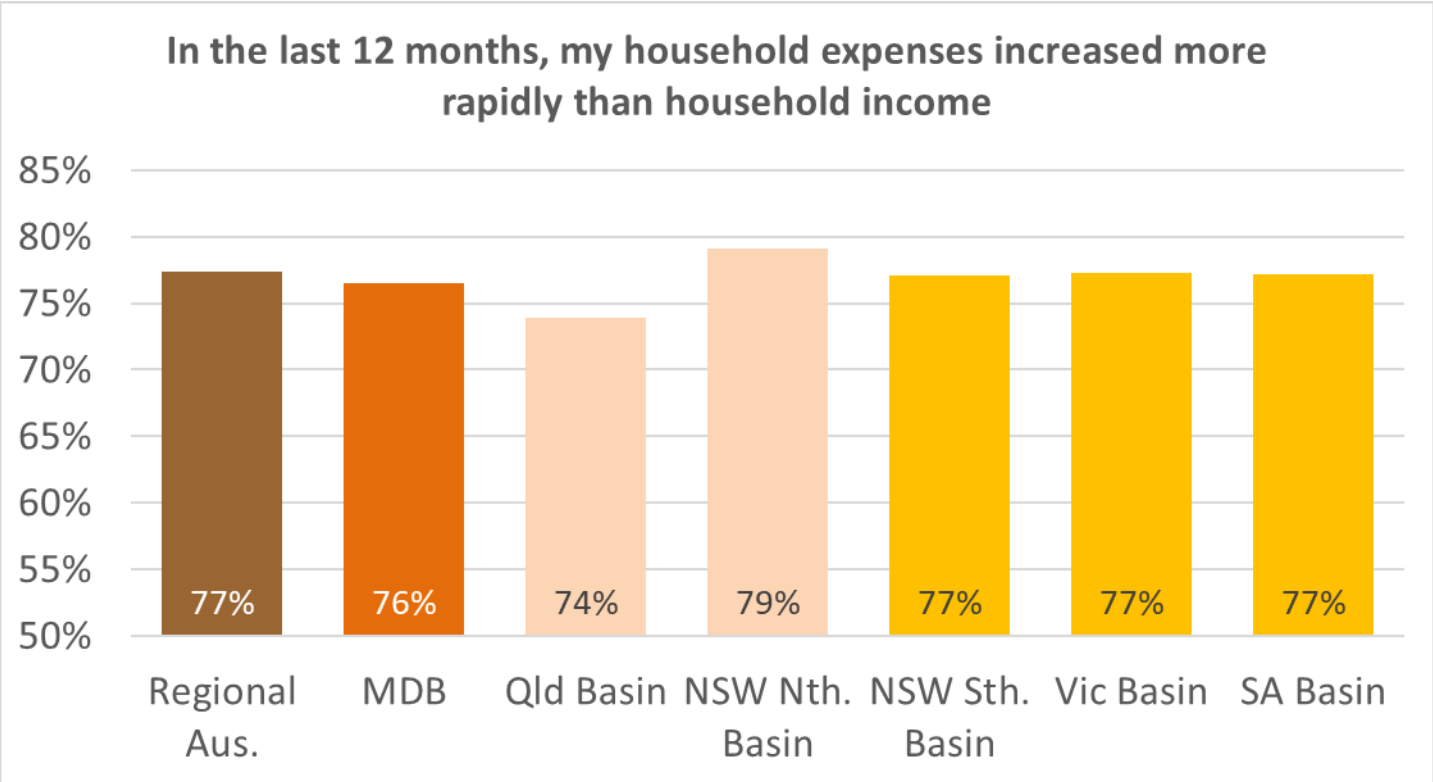
Low wellbeing rose across Australia in the last year, particularly amongst those most impacted by rising cost of living.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



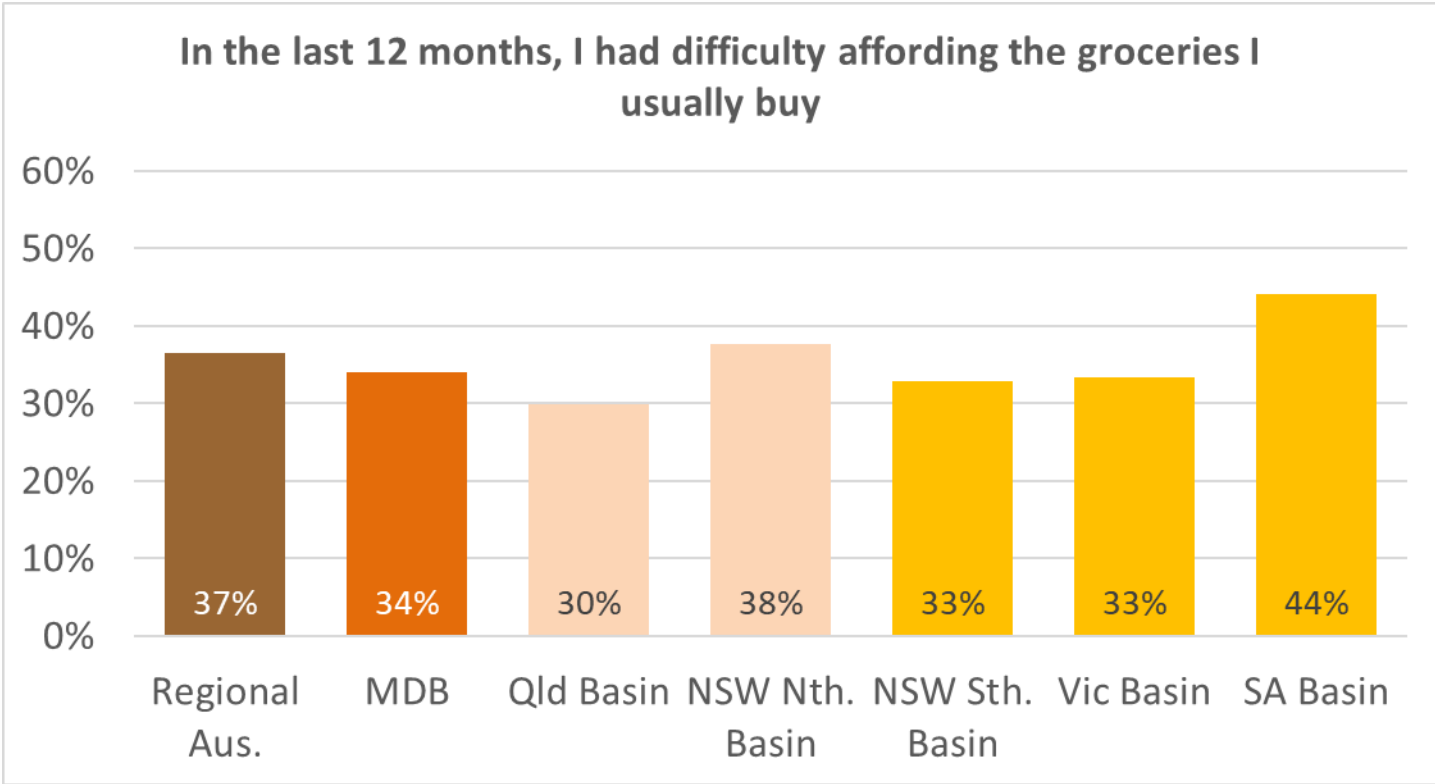
Lack of affordable quality housing is a significant issue across regional Australia.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



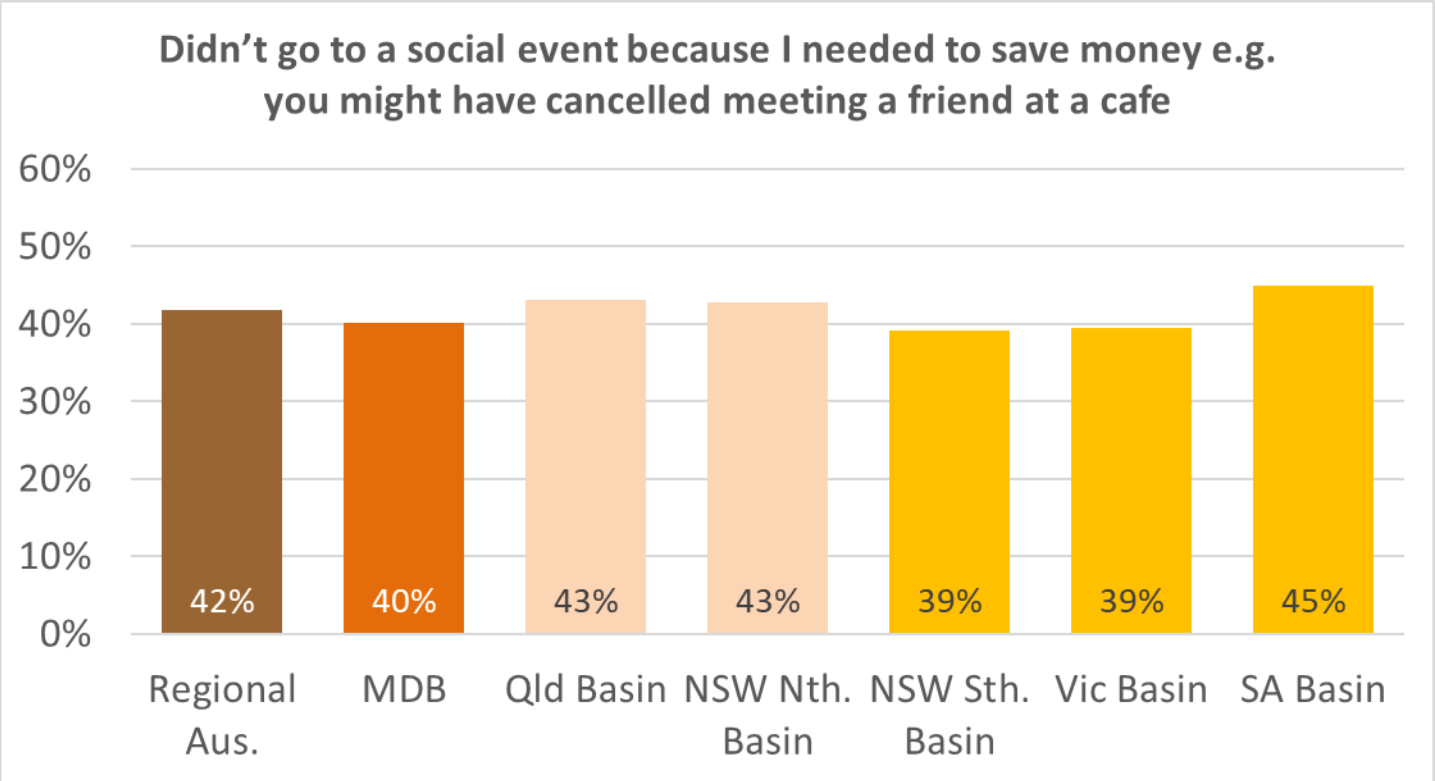
Across Australia, cost of living challenges are associated with growth in low wellbeing

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



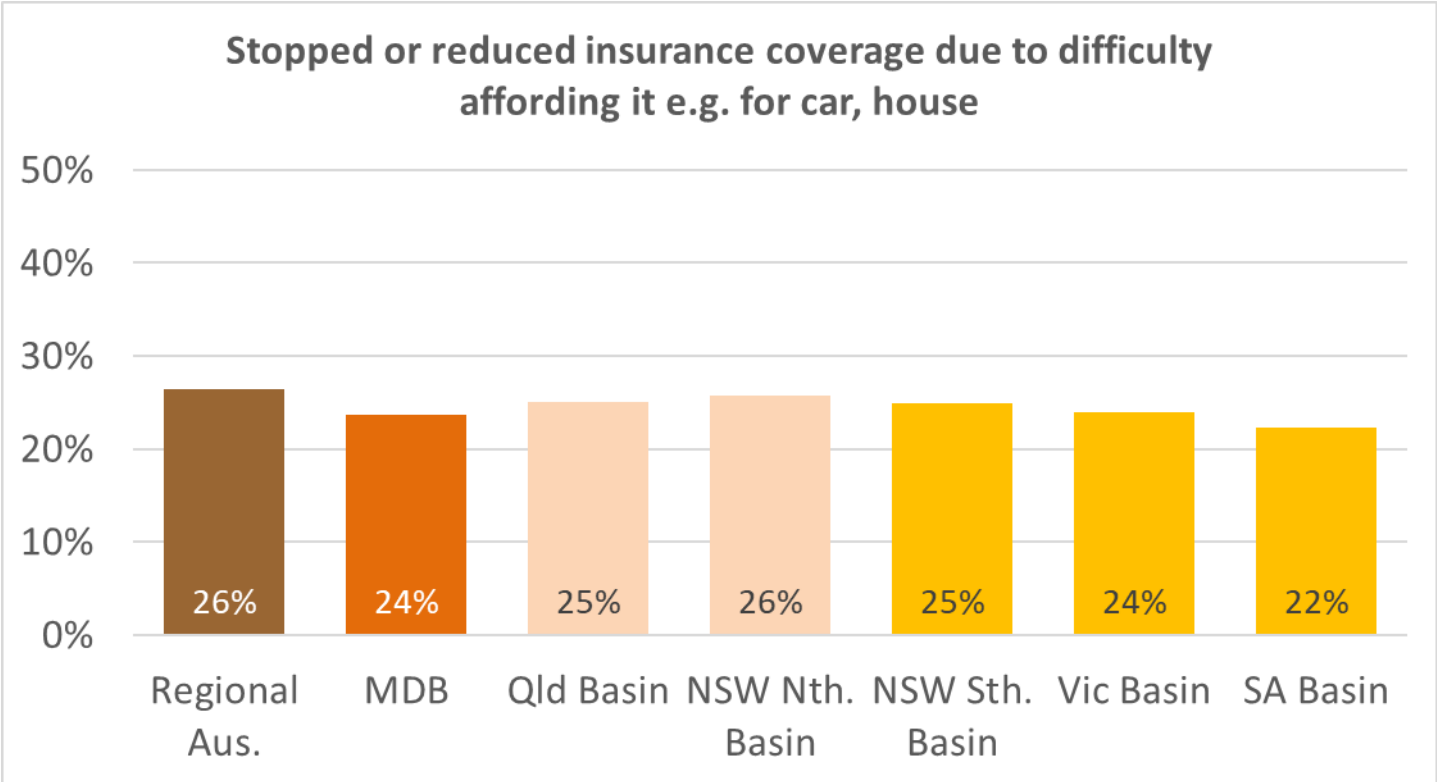
The specific impacts of rising cost of living differ for different households

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



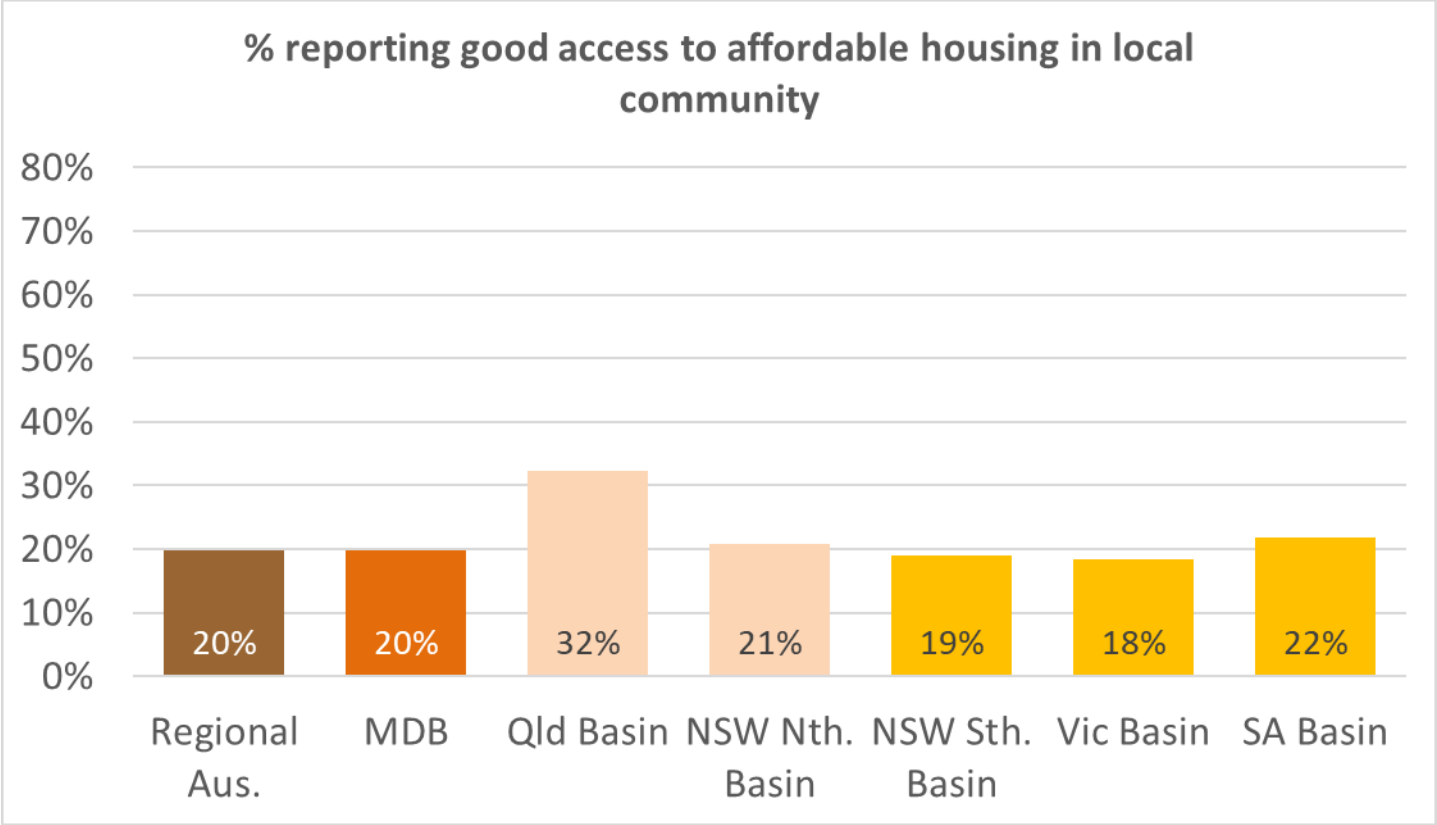
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Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



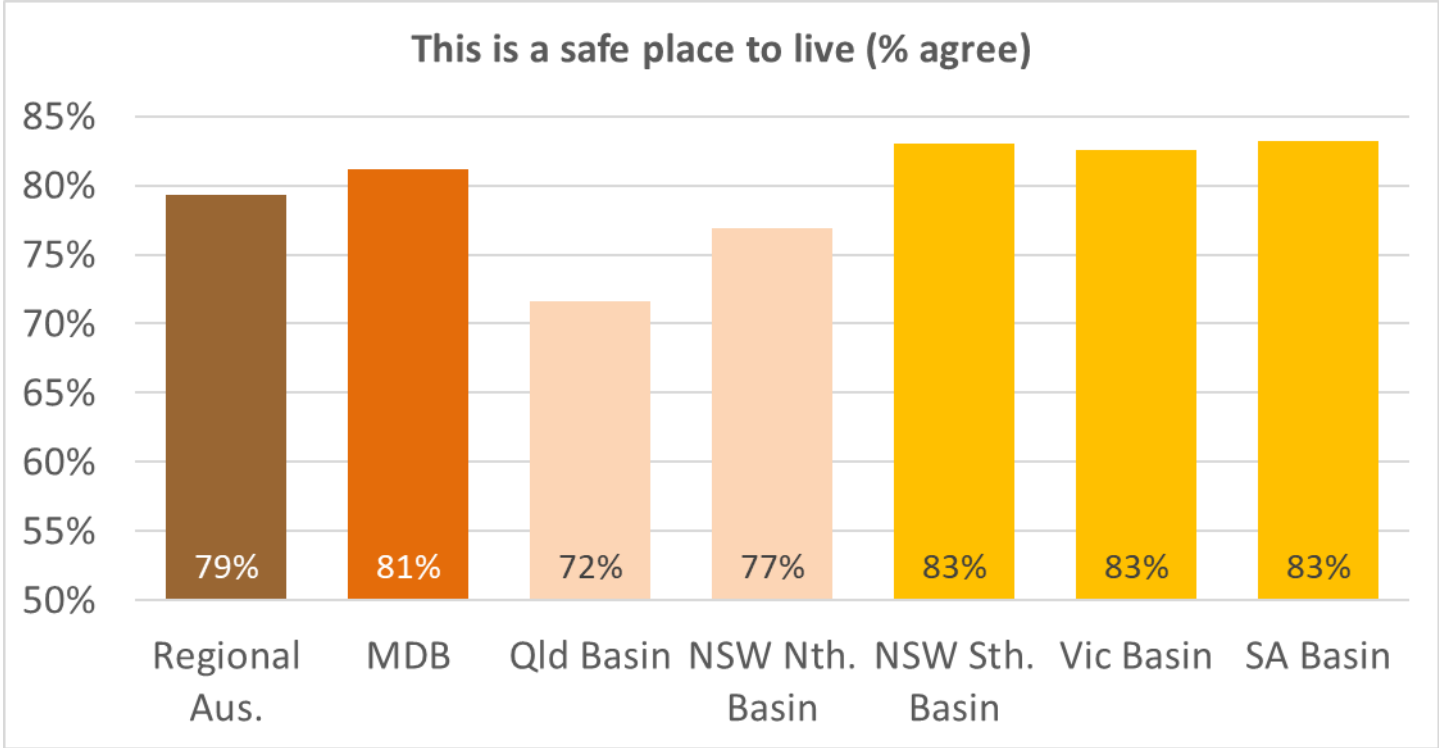
The specific impacts of rising cost of living differ for different households

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



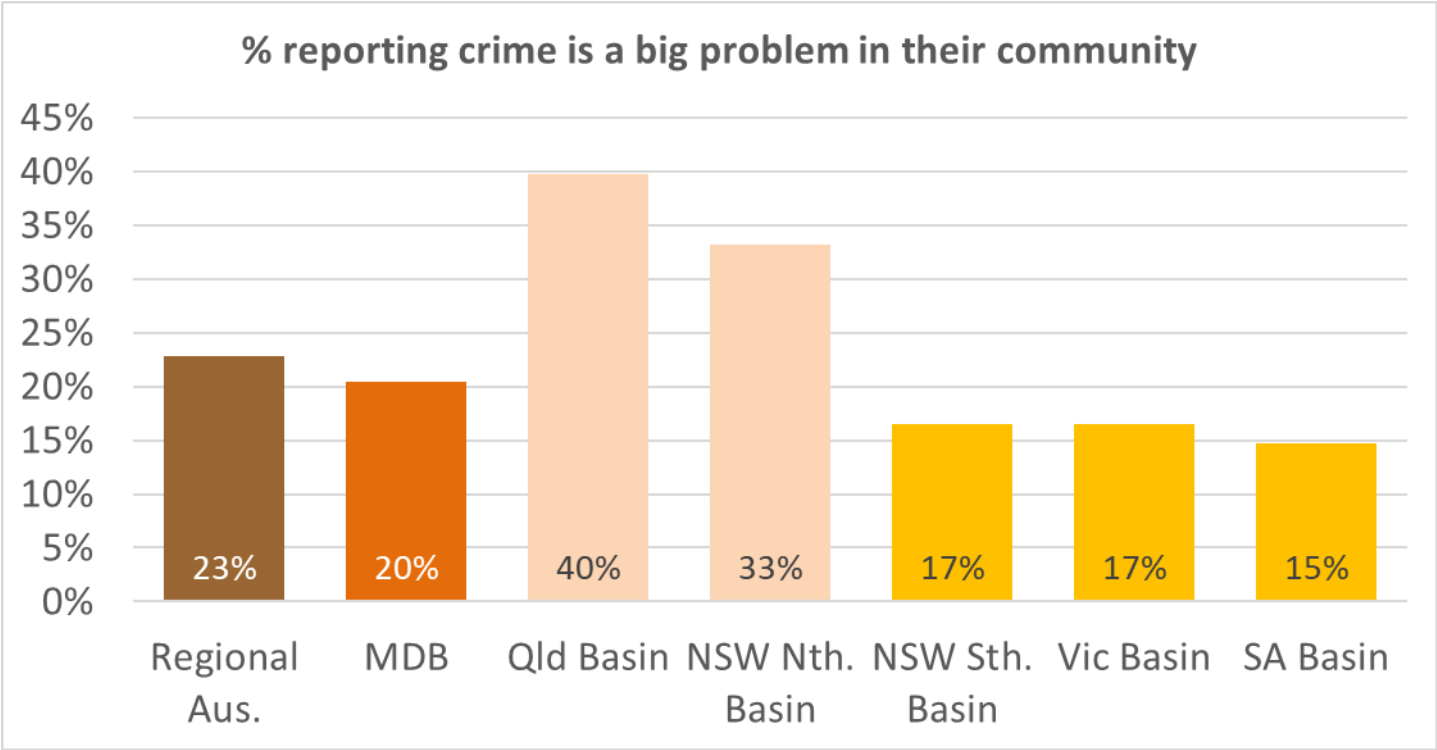
Only 1 in 5 regional Australians feel there's good access to affordable housing in their local community.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



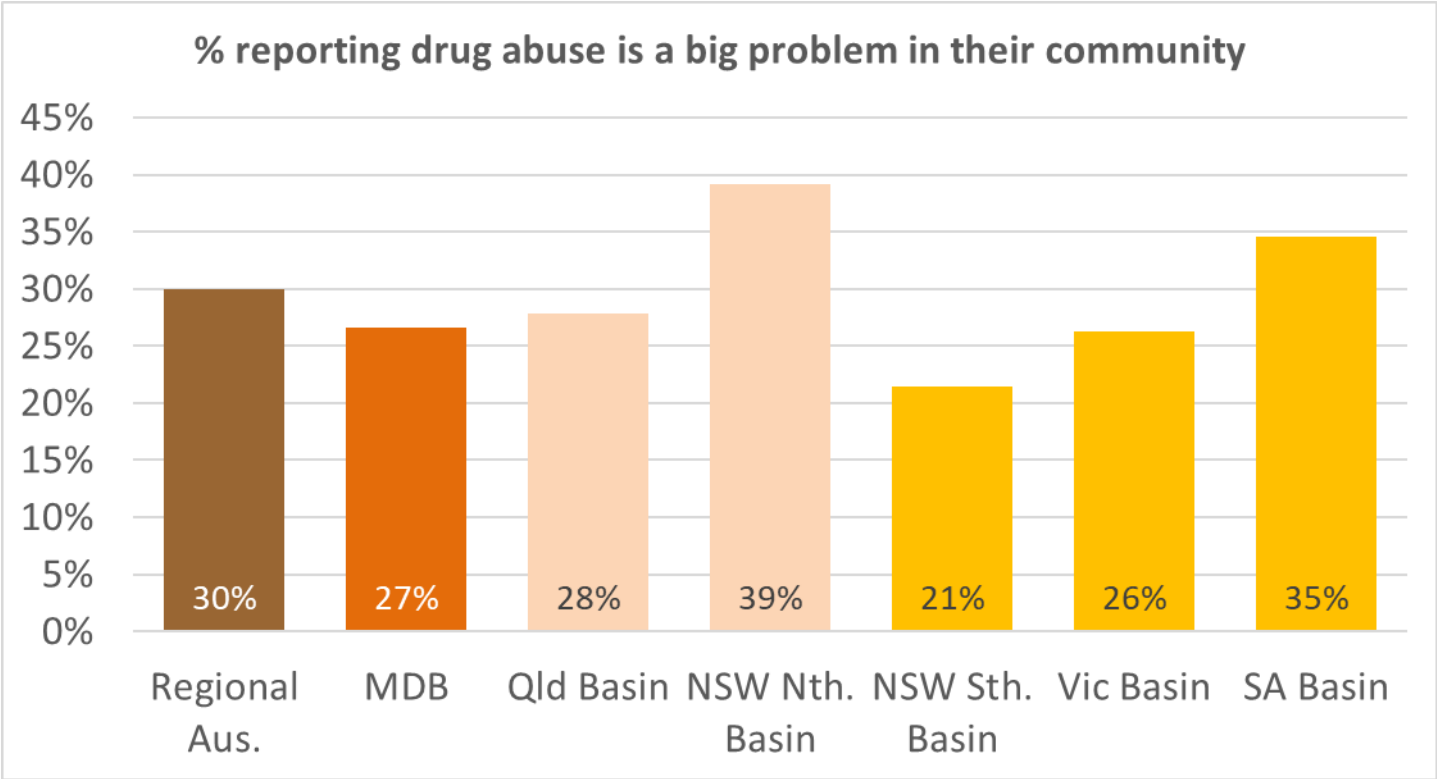
Feelings of safety vary across the Basin – and even more if you look at different local communities.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



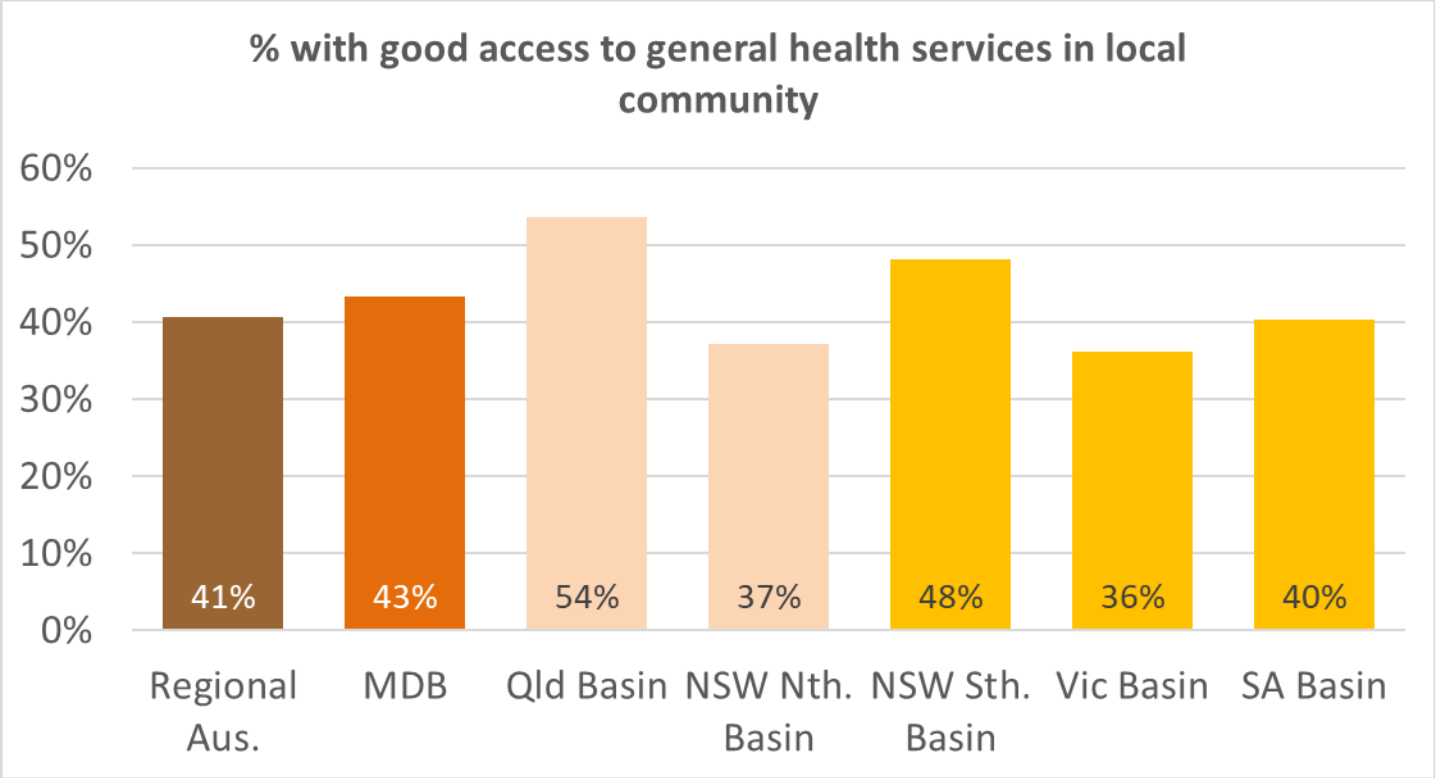
Concerns about crime impact liveability of many communities in the Northern Basin in particular.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



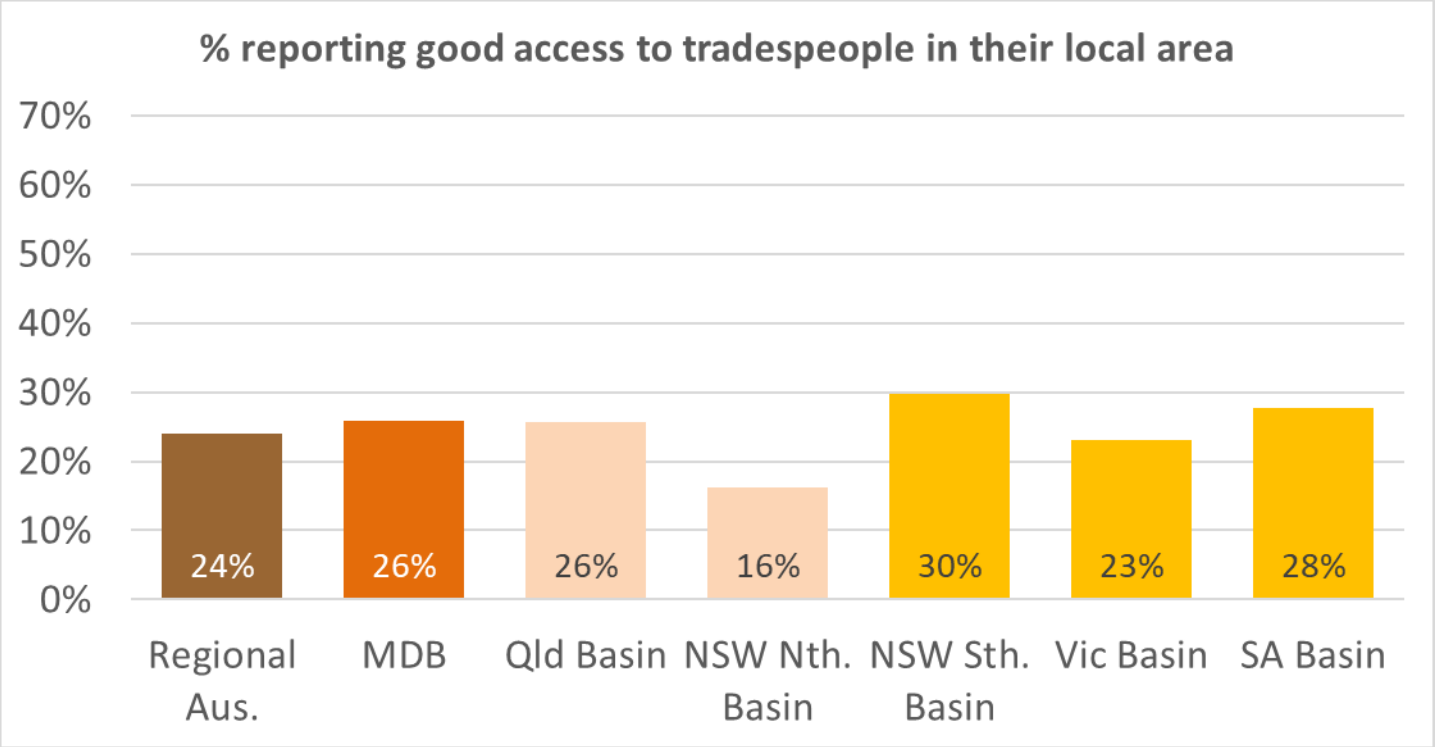
Concerns about drug use have been increasing in regional Australia over the last decade – particularly in NSW Northern Basin and SA Basin.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



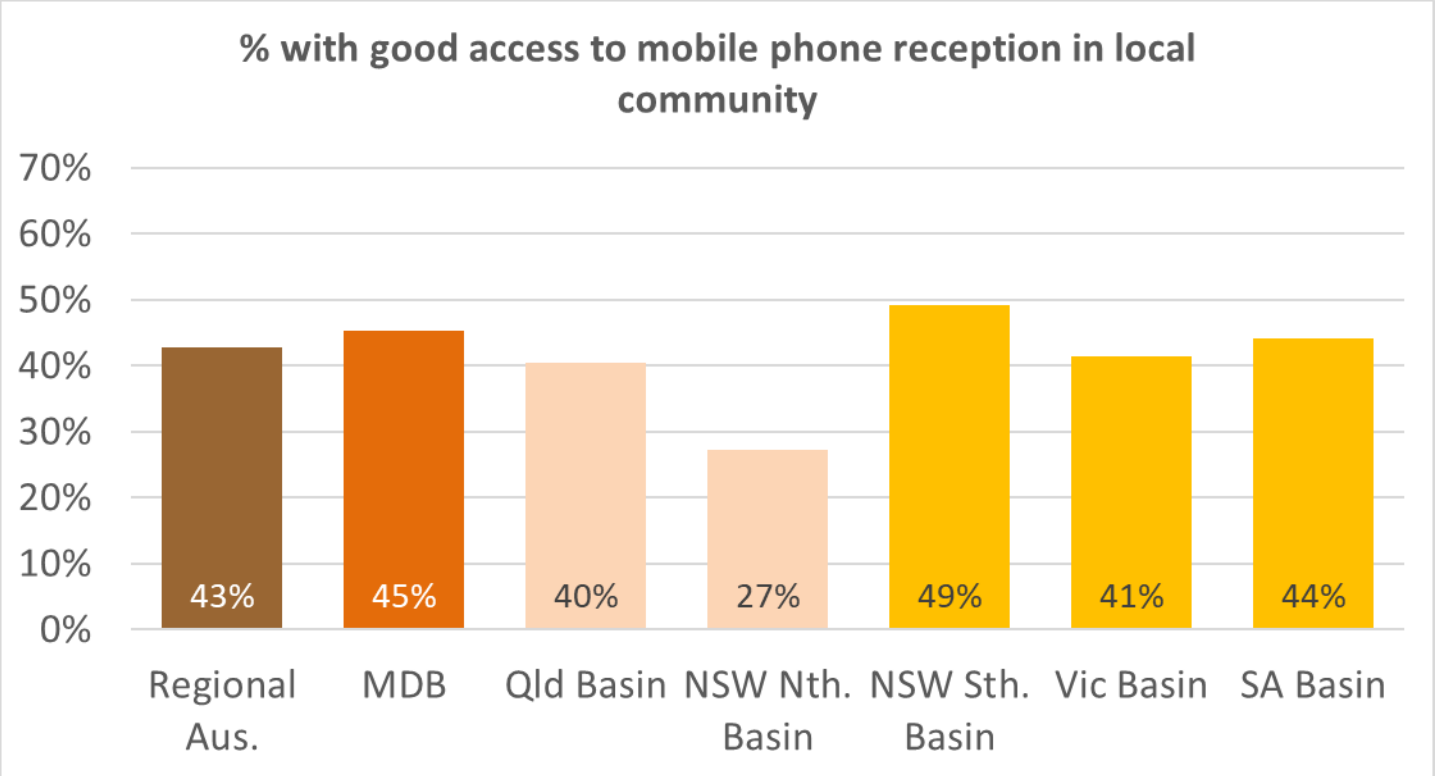
We need to find better ways to get general health services to regional communities with little improvement in 10 years – and declining access in many.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



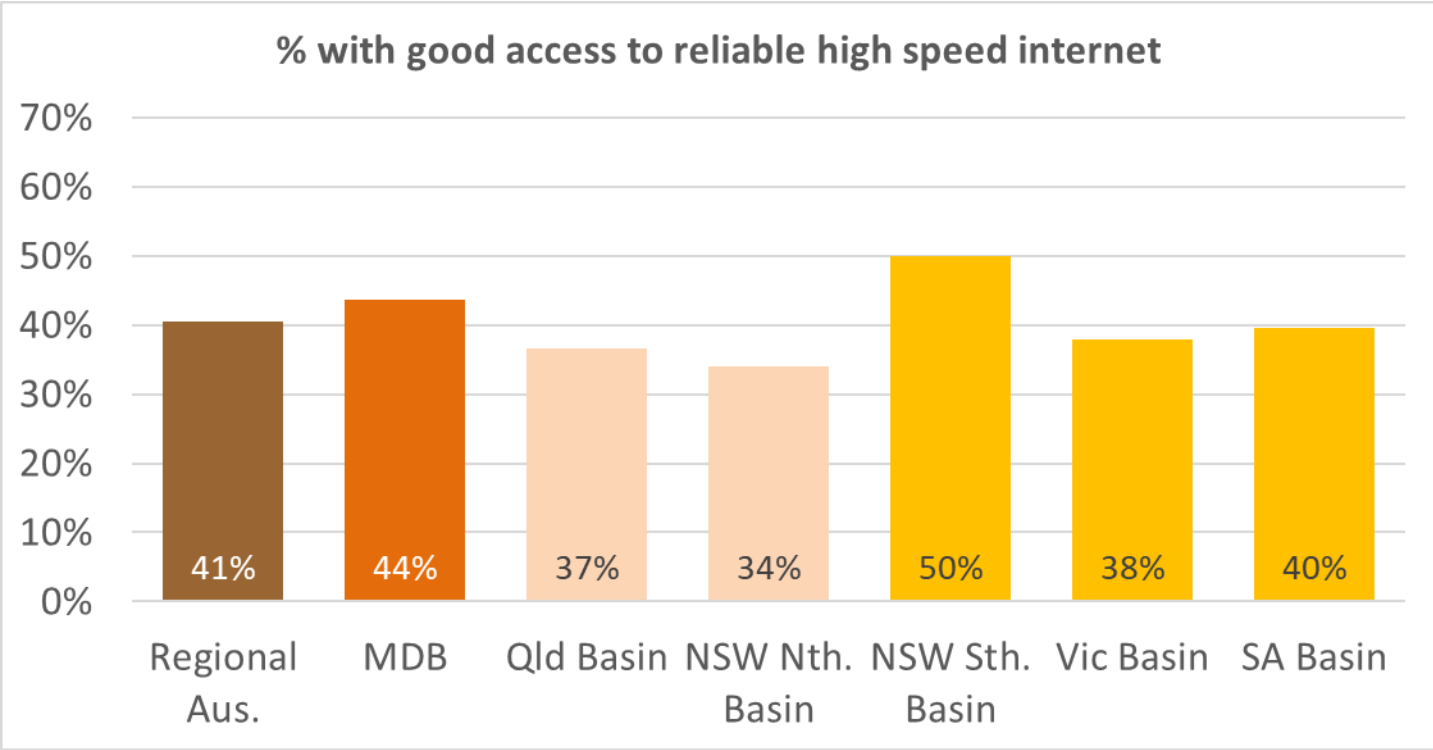
Increasingly, lack of skilled tradies is challenging regional communities.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



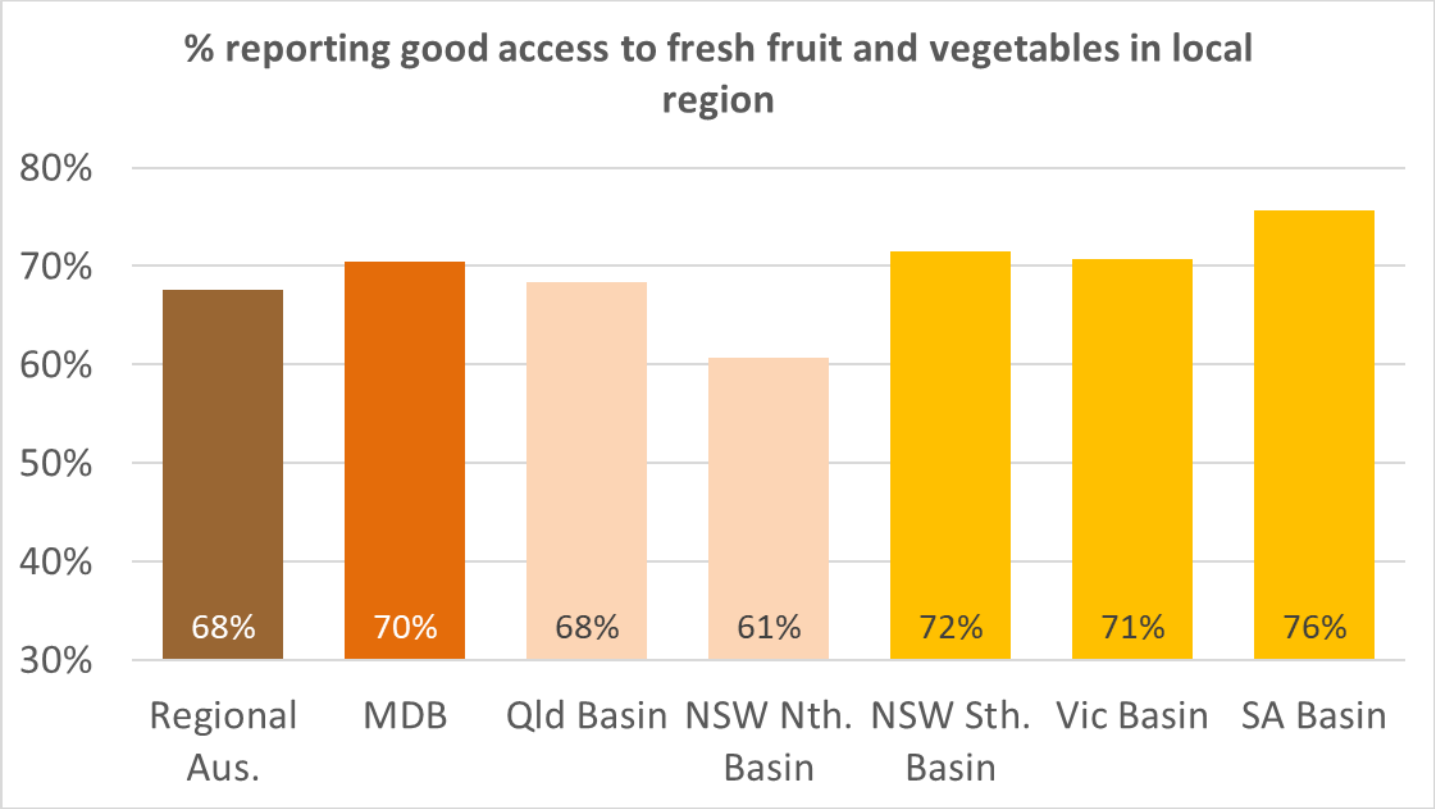
Mobile phone reception is critical to wellbeing, safety, business and liveability – and poor across most of regional Australia.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



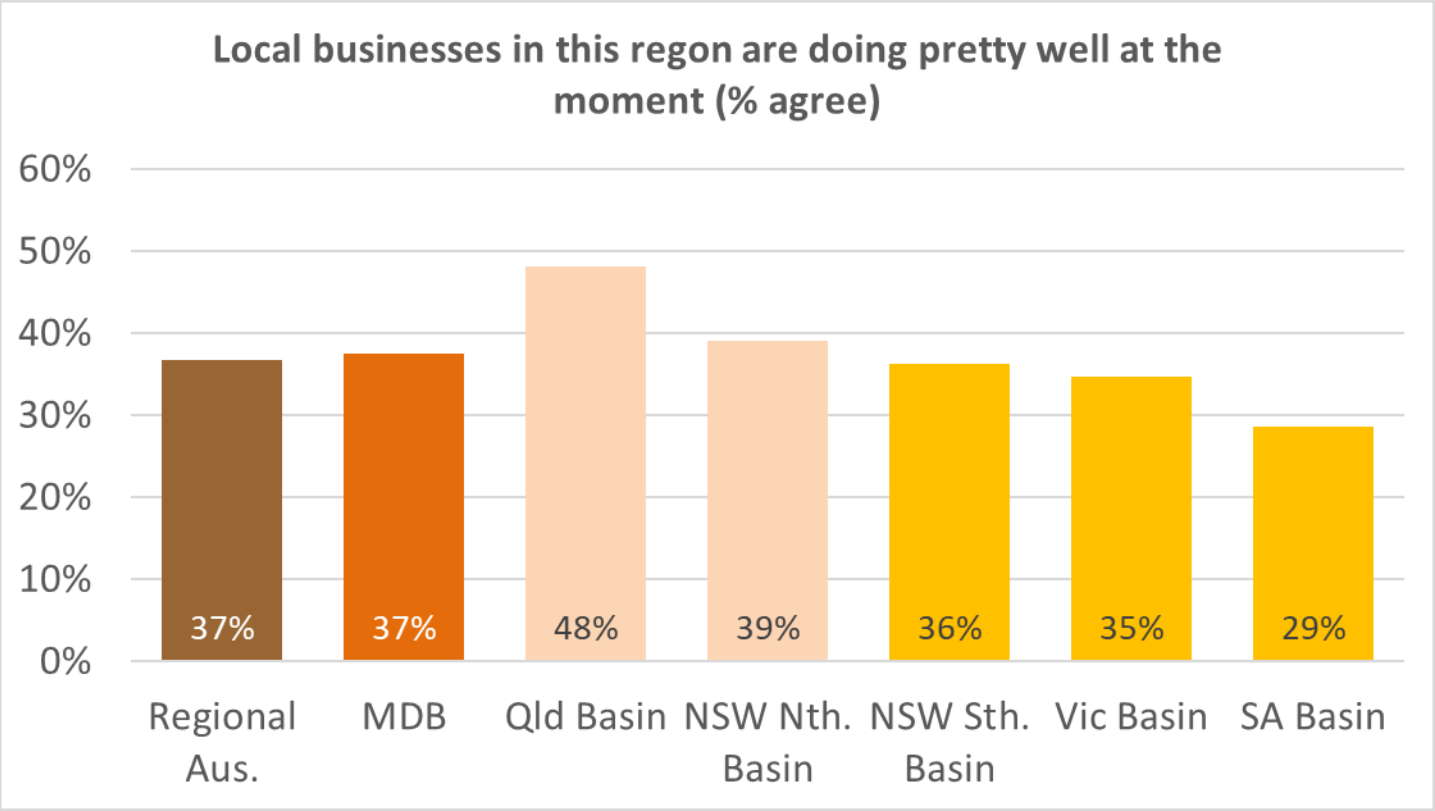
Good internet is critical to business and liveability – and poor across most of regional Australia.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



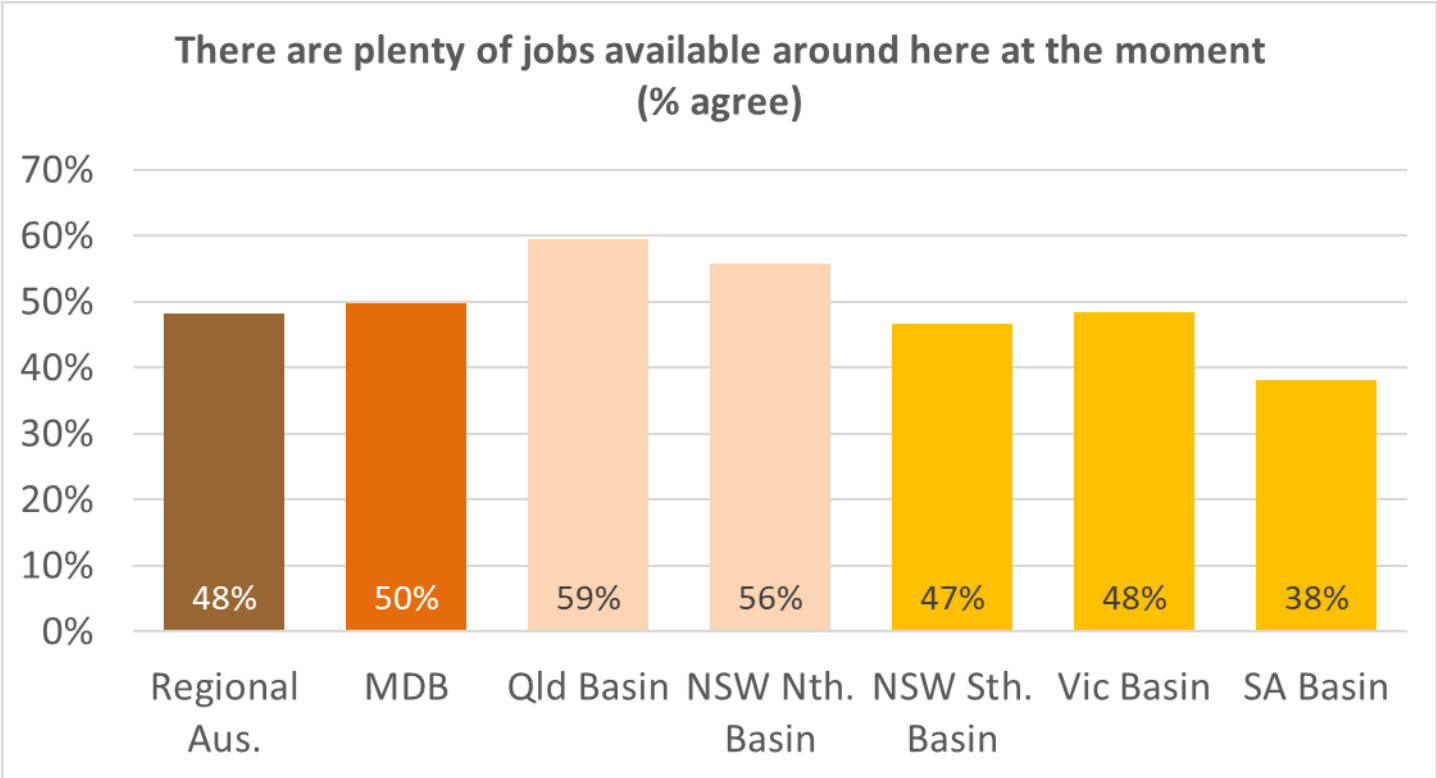
32% of regional Australians lack good access to fresh fruit and vegetables in local shops.

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



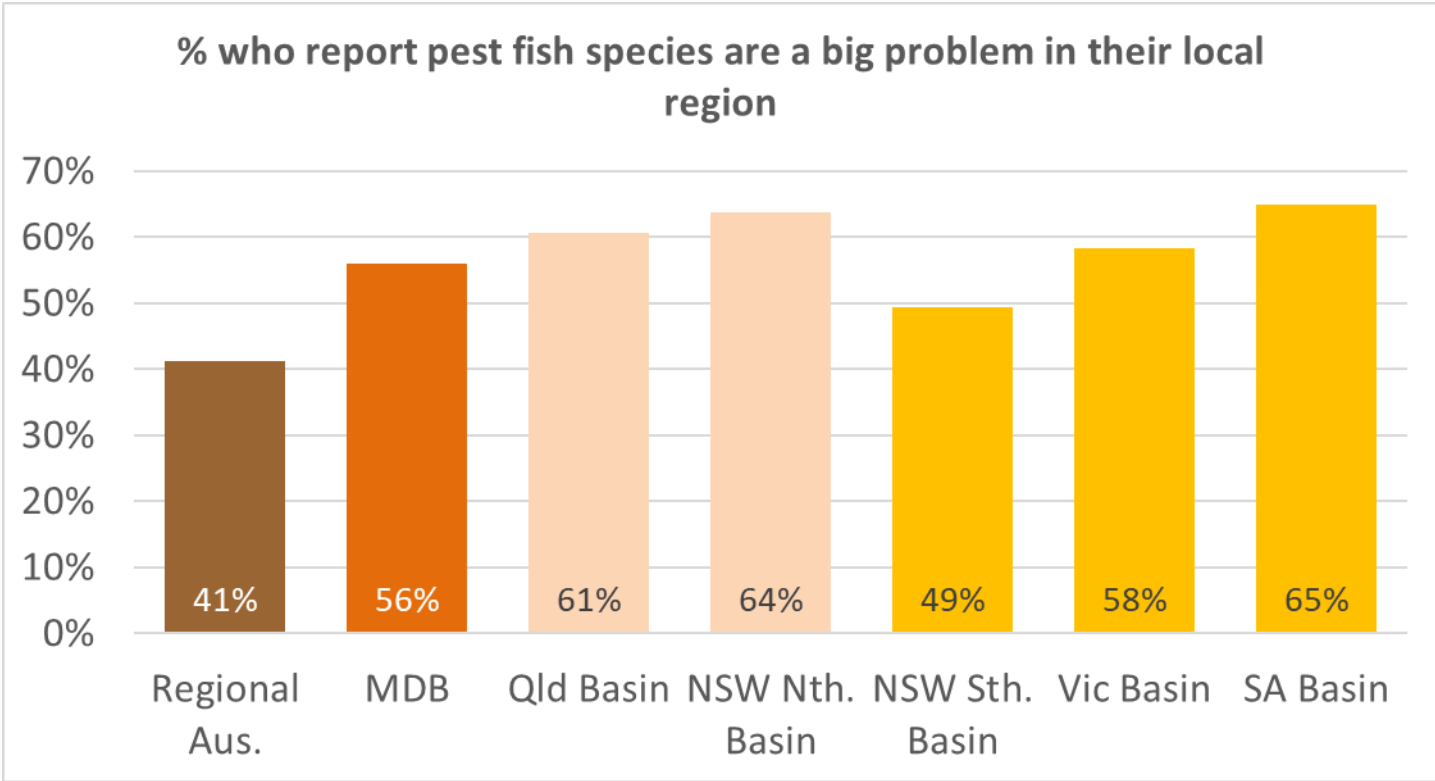
Confidence in local economic conditions is lower in the southern parts of the Basin

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



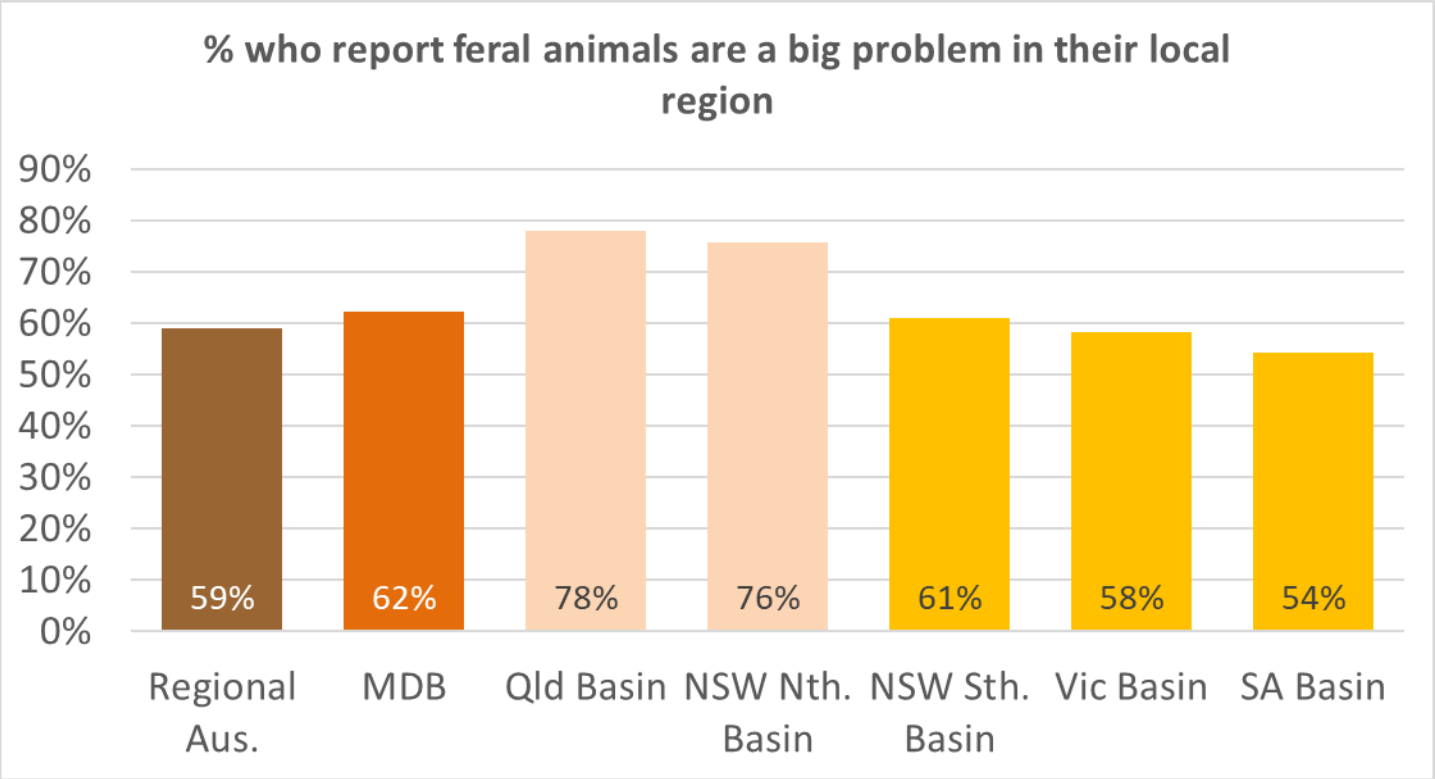
Confidence in job strength is lower in the SA Basin than other areas

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



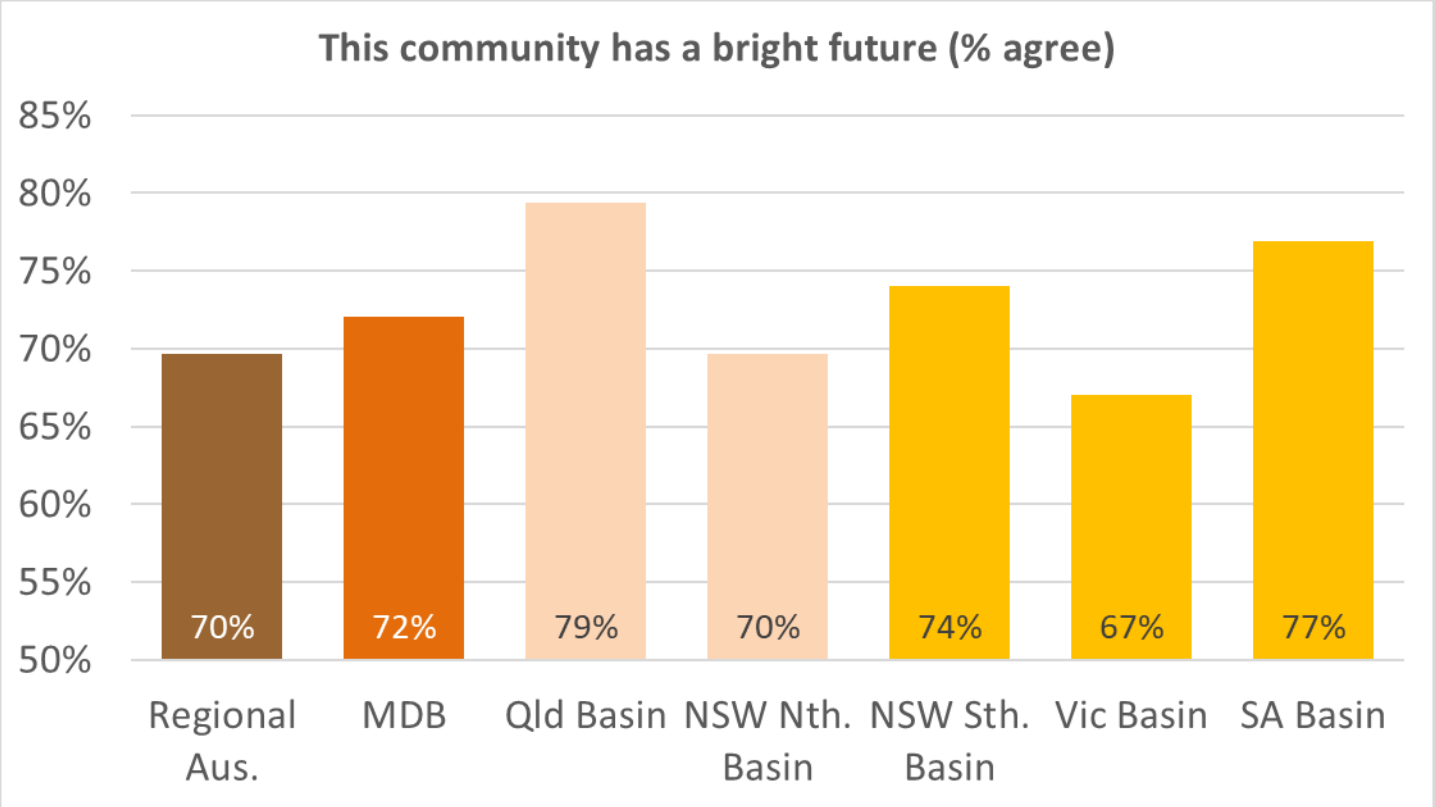
For environmental health, the ‘big three’ concerns are feral animals, pest fish and invasive weeds – water quality is much more specific to different waterways

Liveability and wellbeing in the Basin



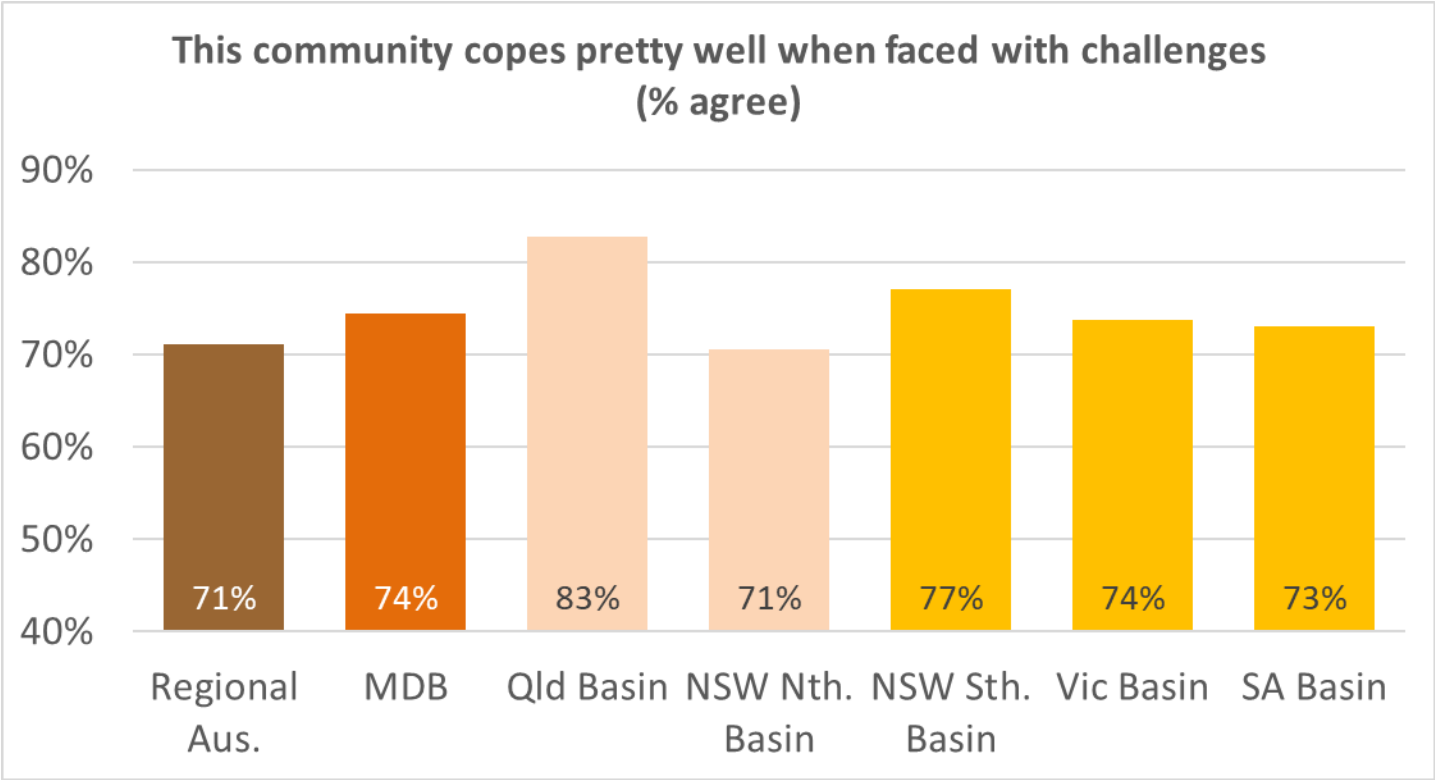
For environmental health, the ‘big three’ concerns are feral animals, pest fish and invasive weeds – water quality is much more specific to different waterways

Confidence in the future



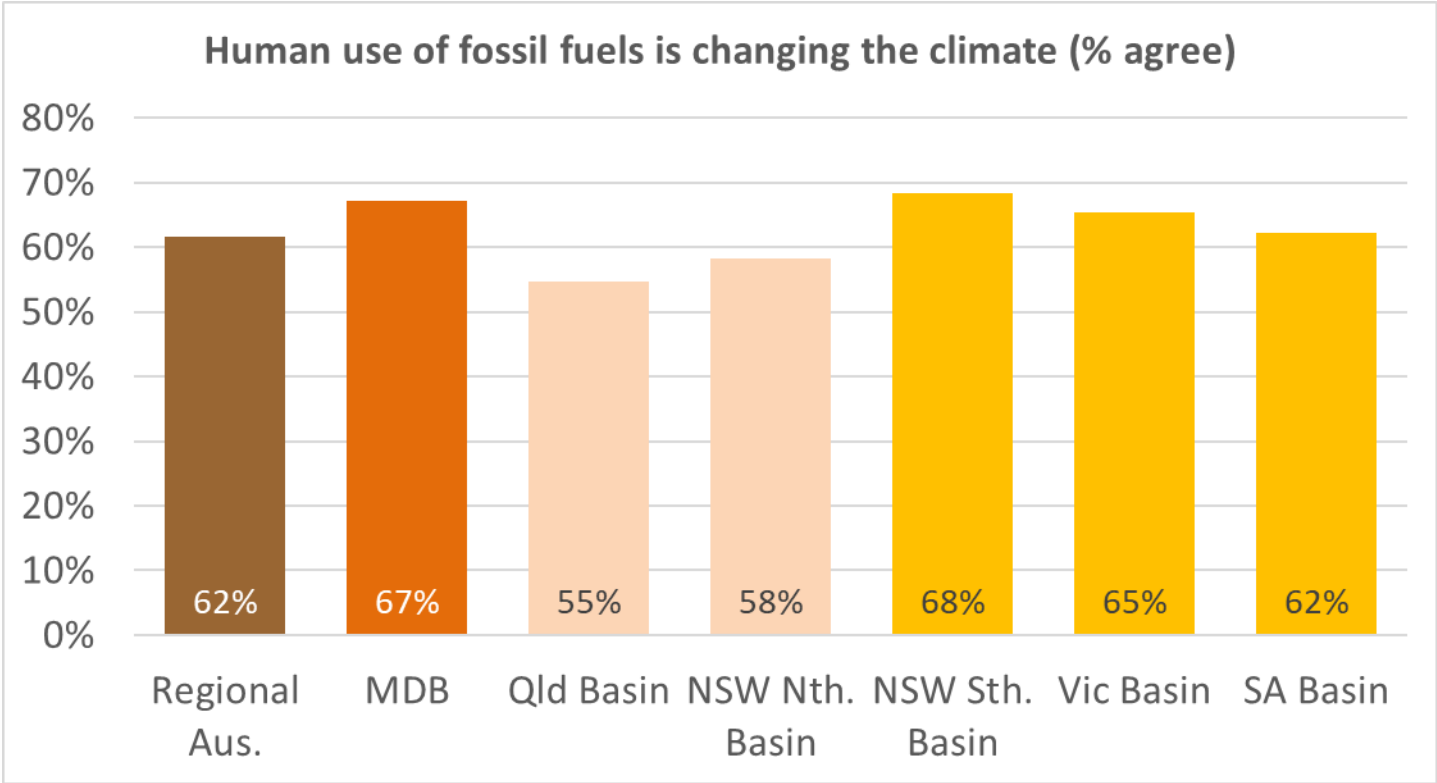
Confidence in the future has declined slightly over time, from 75% in 2013 to 70% in 2023.

Confidence in the future



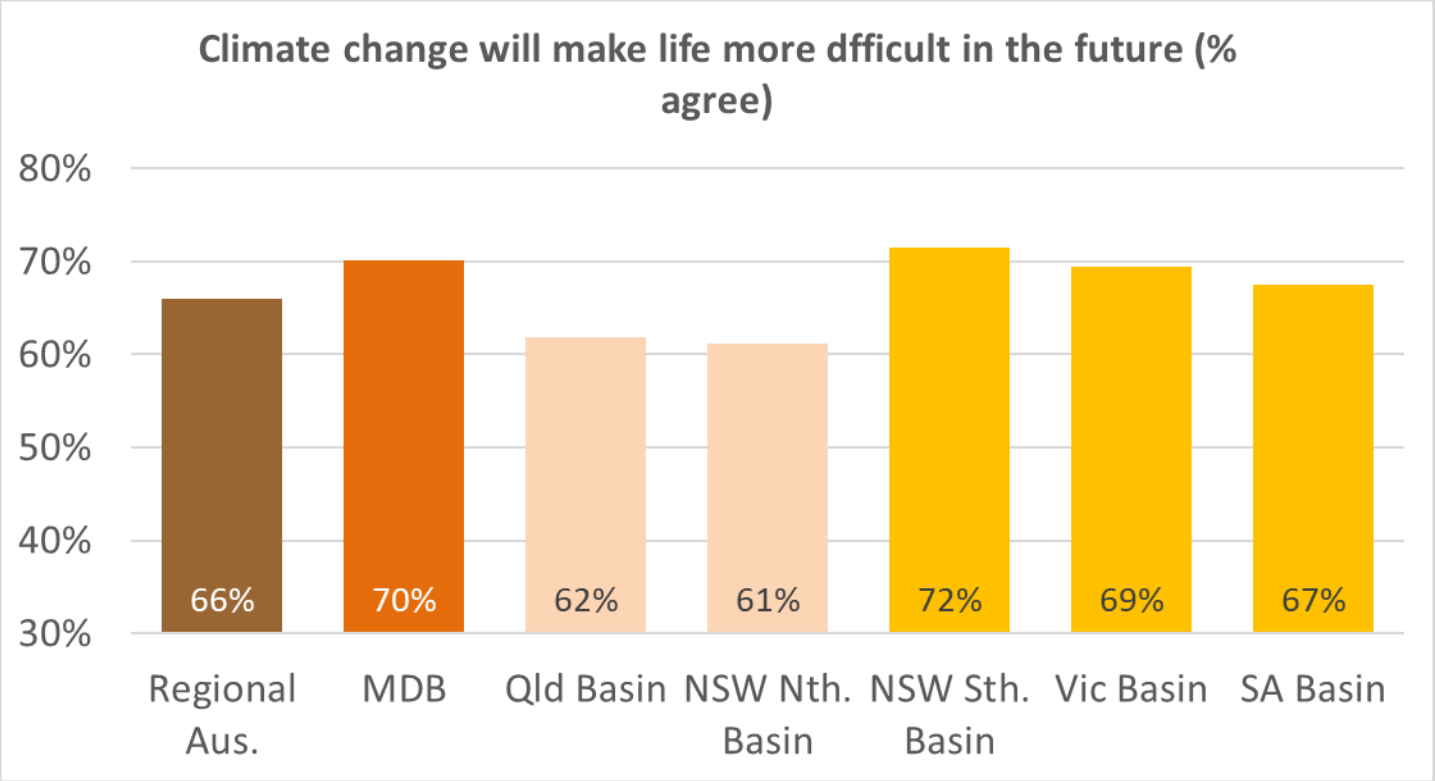
Confidence in ability to cope with challenges is high – except in communities that have experienced 3+ cumulative disasters within the last 5 years, where it has often fallen.

Confidence in the future



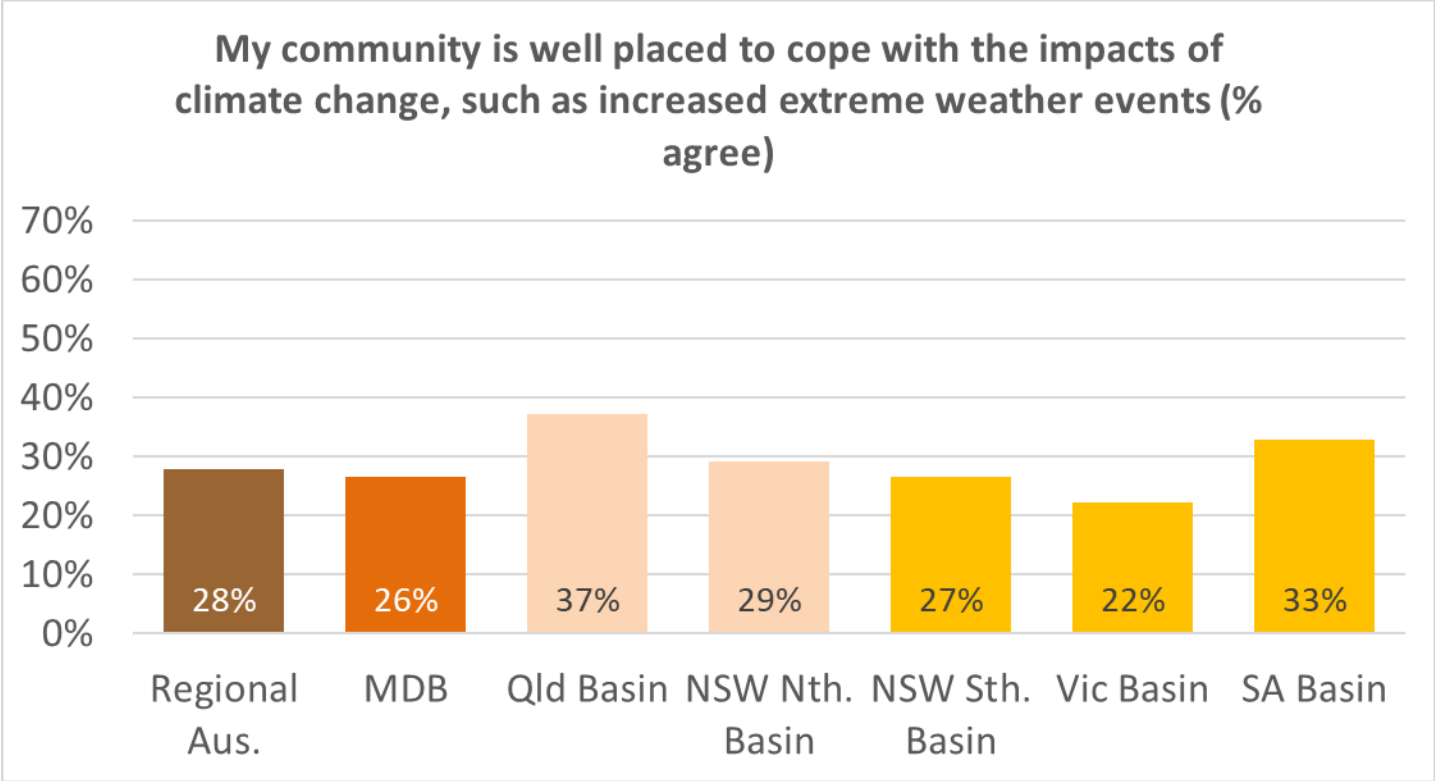
2 in 3 Basin residents believe humans are changing the climate

Confidence in the future



Most feel climate change will make life more difficult (and many that it already is)

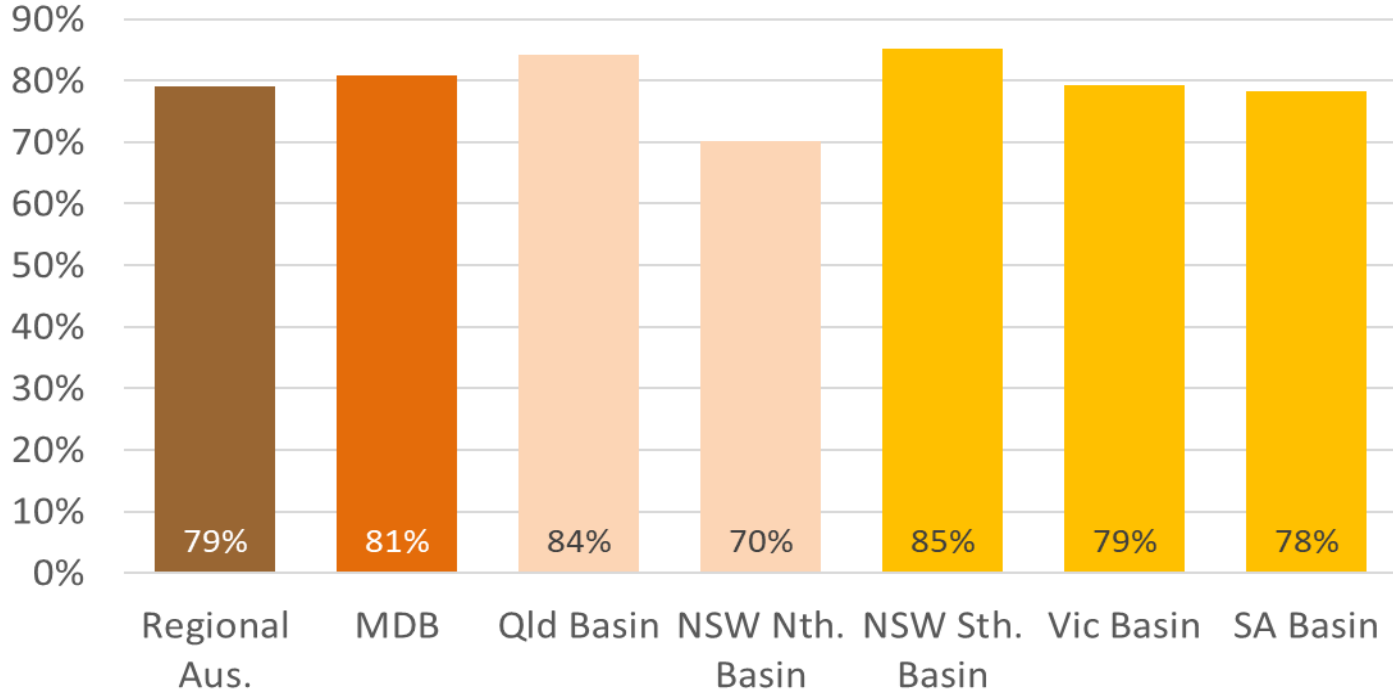
Confidence in the future



Relatively few regional Australians feel their community is well placed to cope with the impacts of climate change.

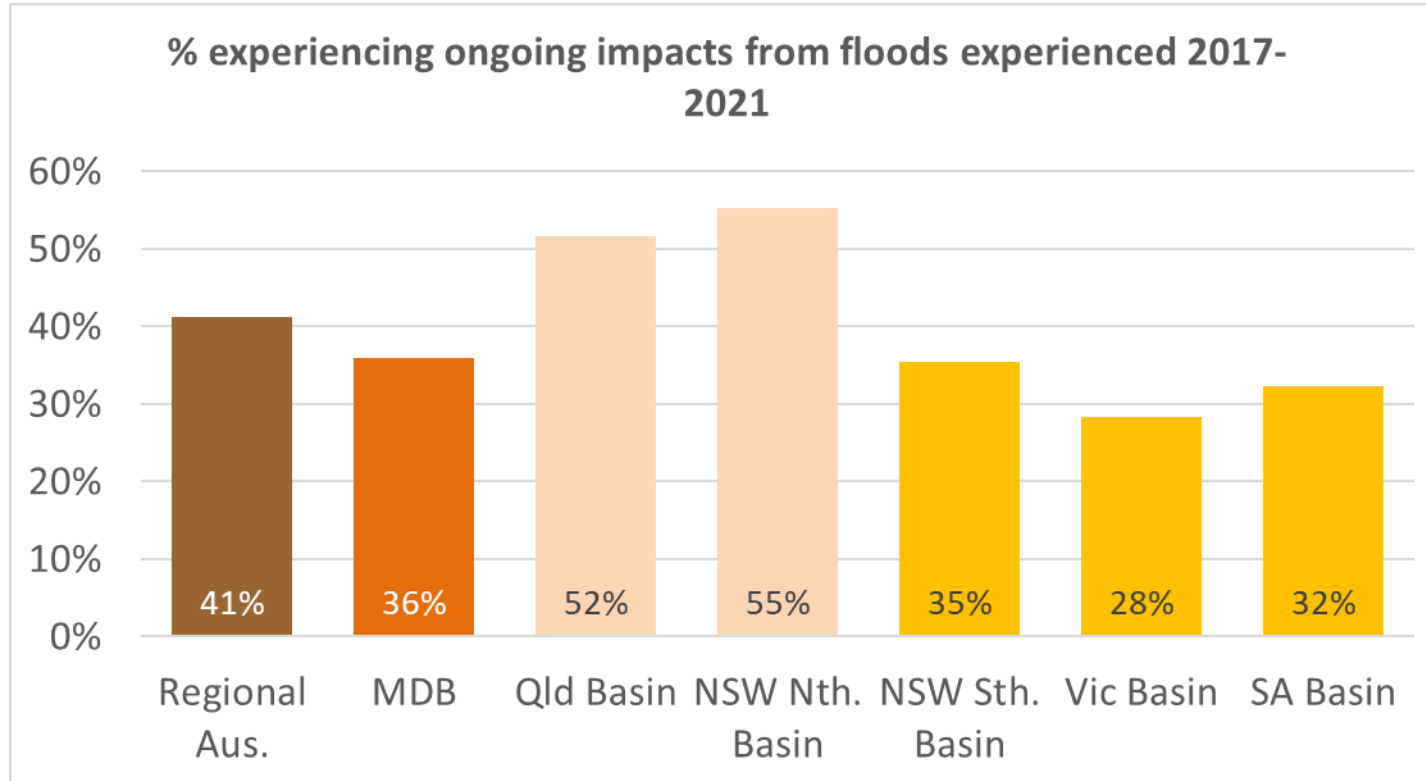
Drought and disaster resilience and recovery

I feel pretty well recovered (% of those materially impacted by one or more disasters 2017-2022)



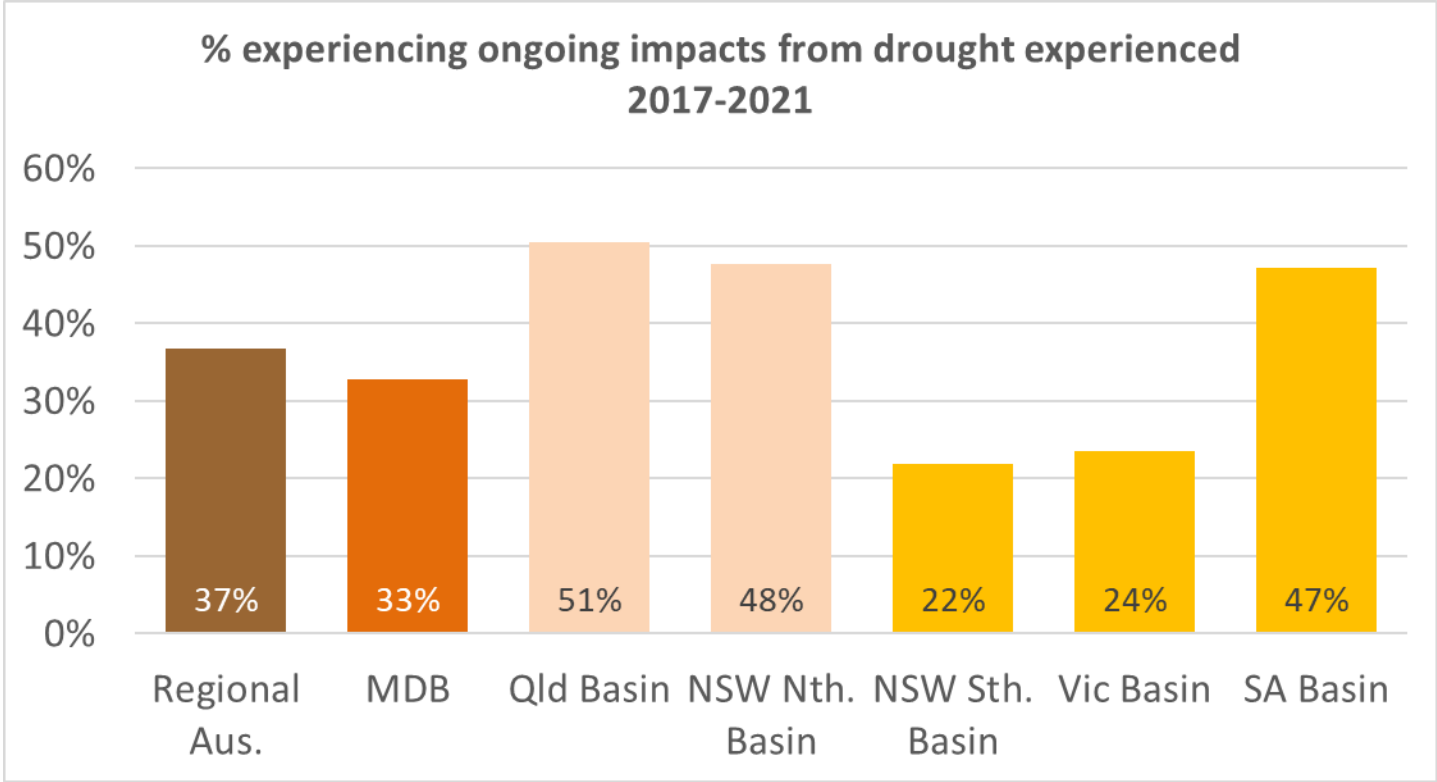
Most people directly impacted by natural hazards (drought, fire, flood, storm) recover within a 3-4 year period

Drought and disaster resilience and recovery



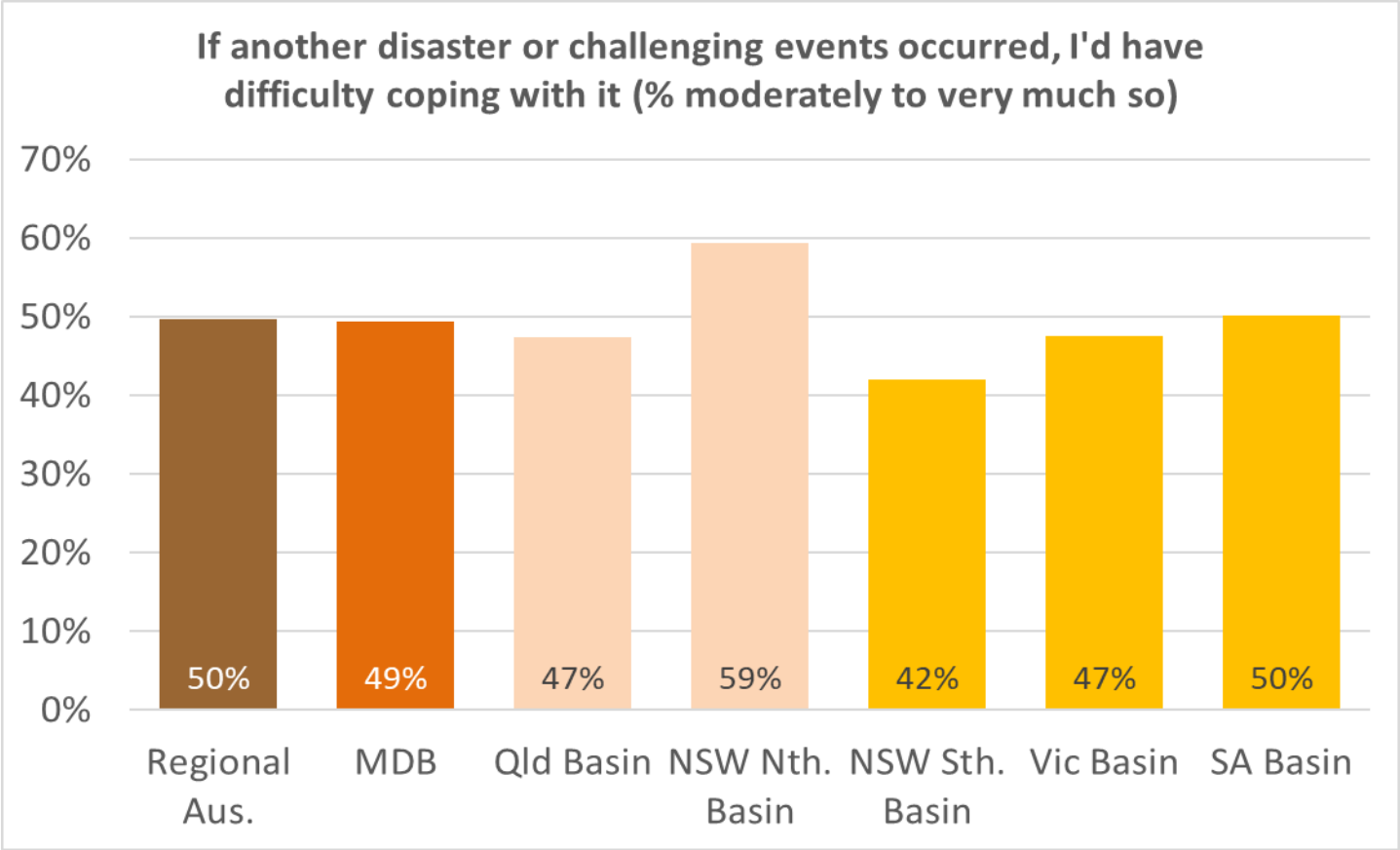
Increasingly, people don't have time to fully recover from one event before the next one hits. Ongoing impacts typically last at least 3-5 years for those who experience significant loss.

Drought and disaster resilience and recovery



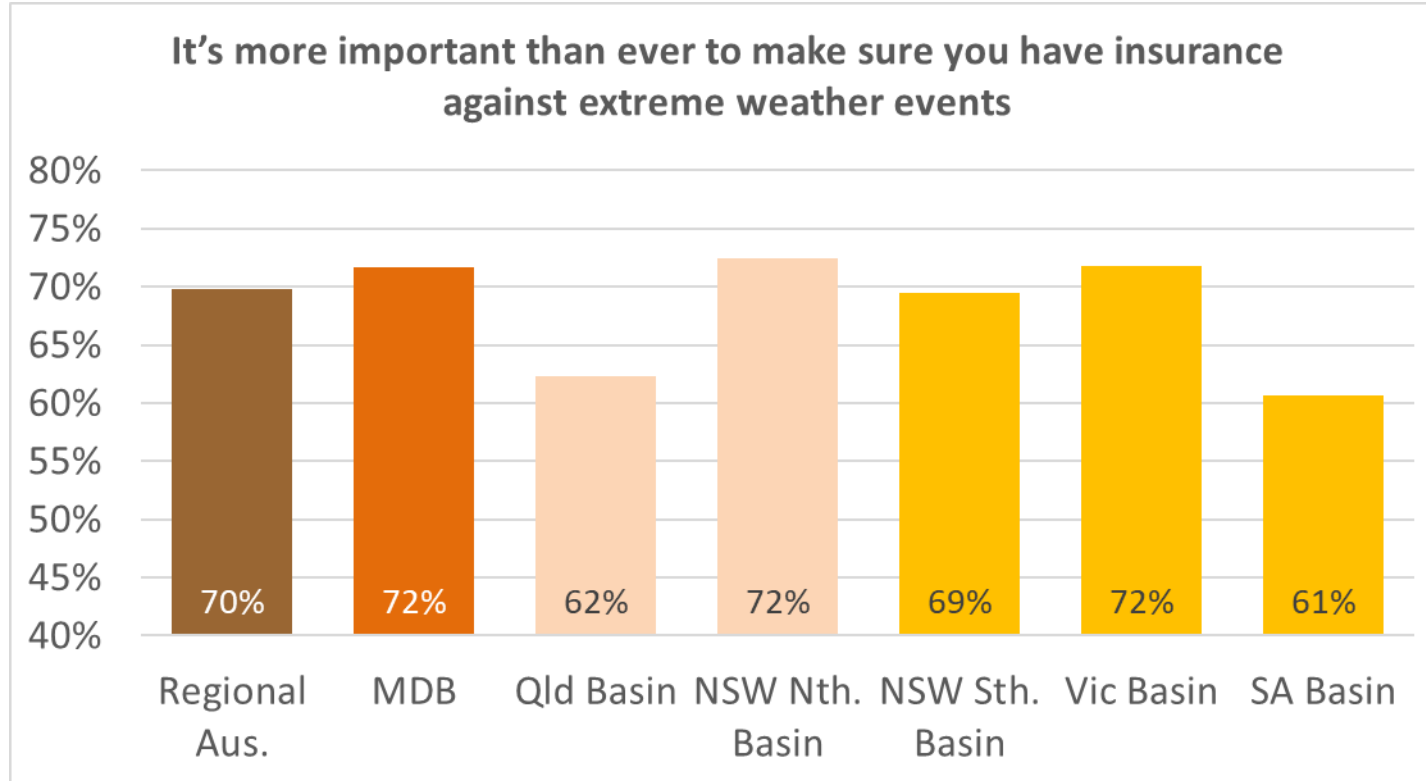
Impacts of drought continue after drought – often for some years.

Drought and disaster resilience and recovery



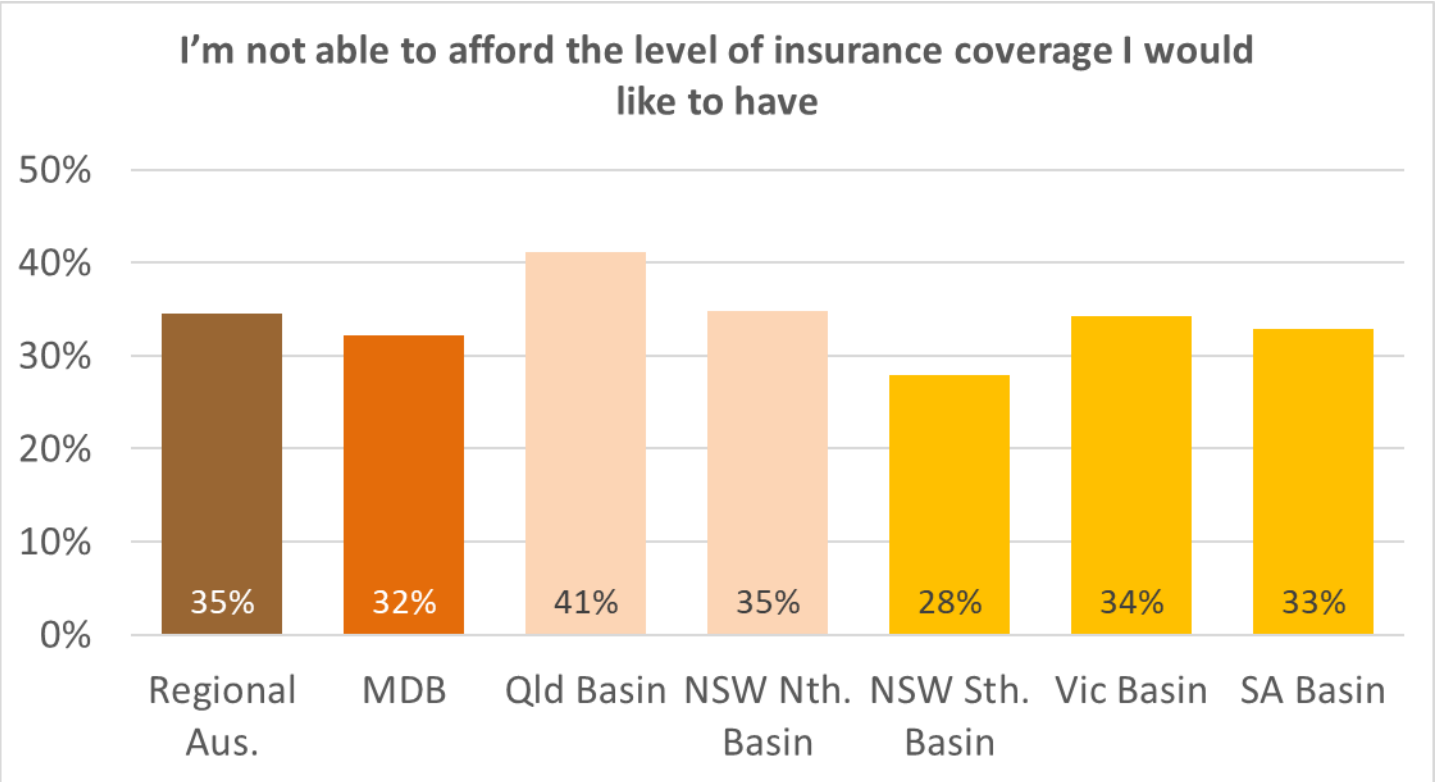
As we experience more frequent, intense natural hazards, confidence in ability to cope has declined in some areas

Drought and disaster resilience and recovery



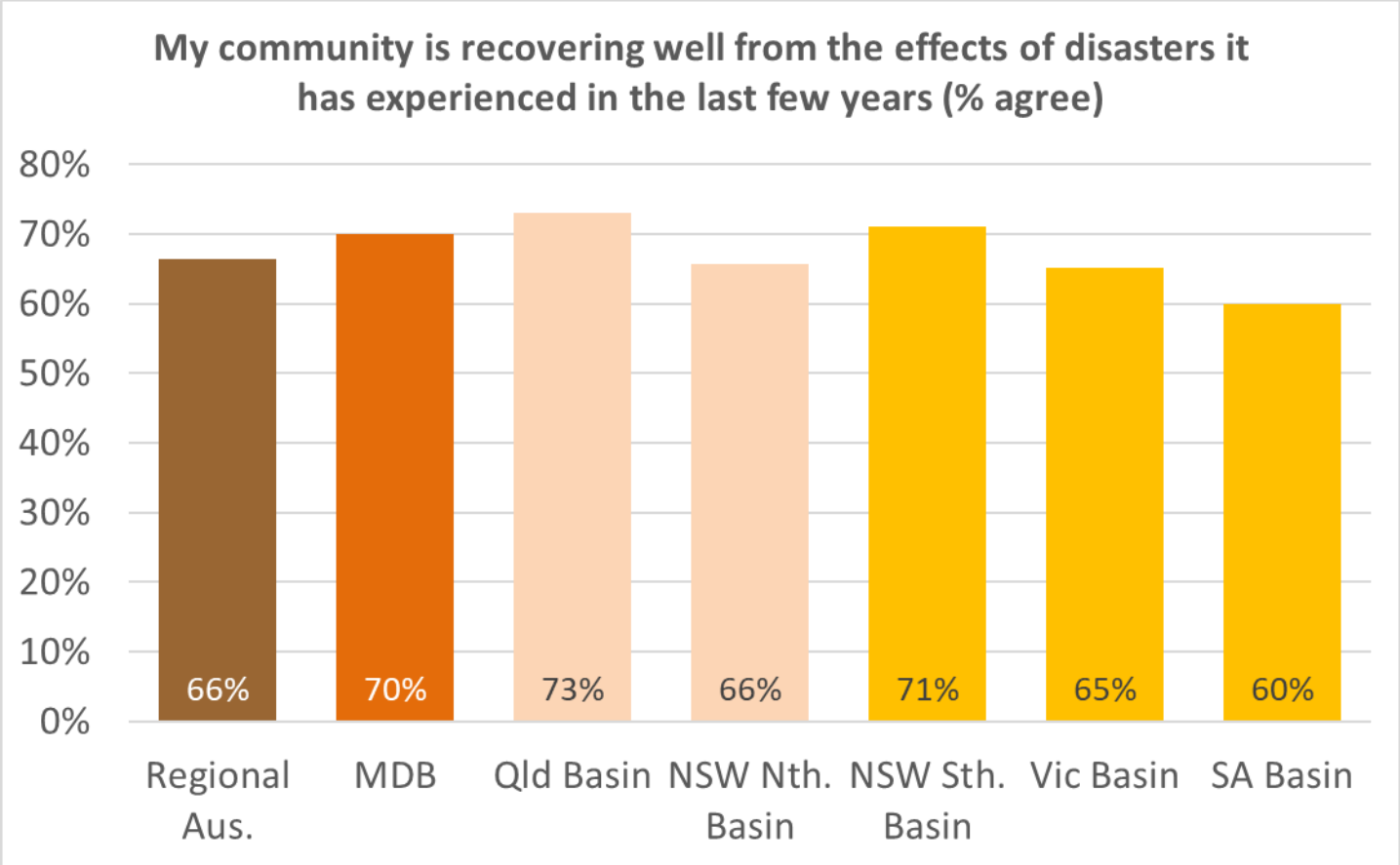
Insurance is recognised as important by most – but not always possible to afford.

Drought and disaster resilience and recovery



One-third of regional Australians cannot afford the level of insurance coverage they want to have.

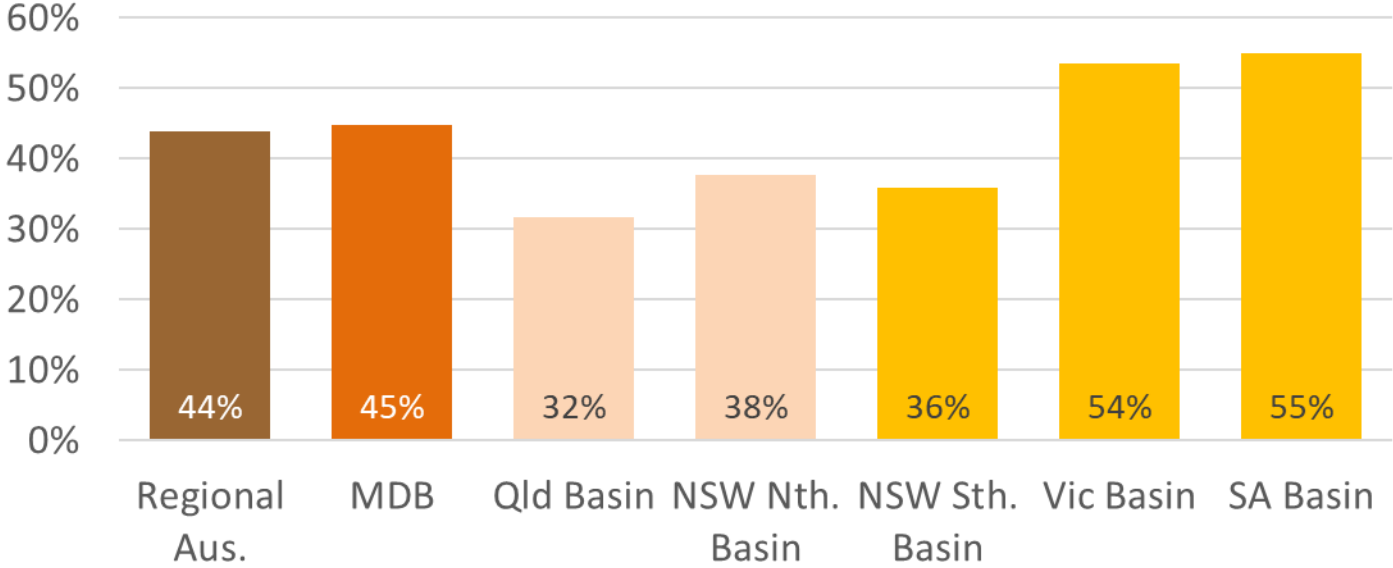
Drought and disaster resilience and recovery



Personal recovery and community recover go hand in hand

Drought and disaster resilience and recovery

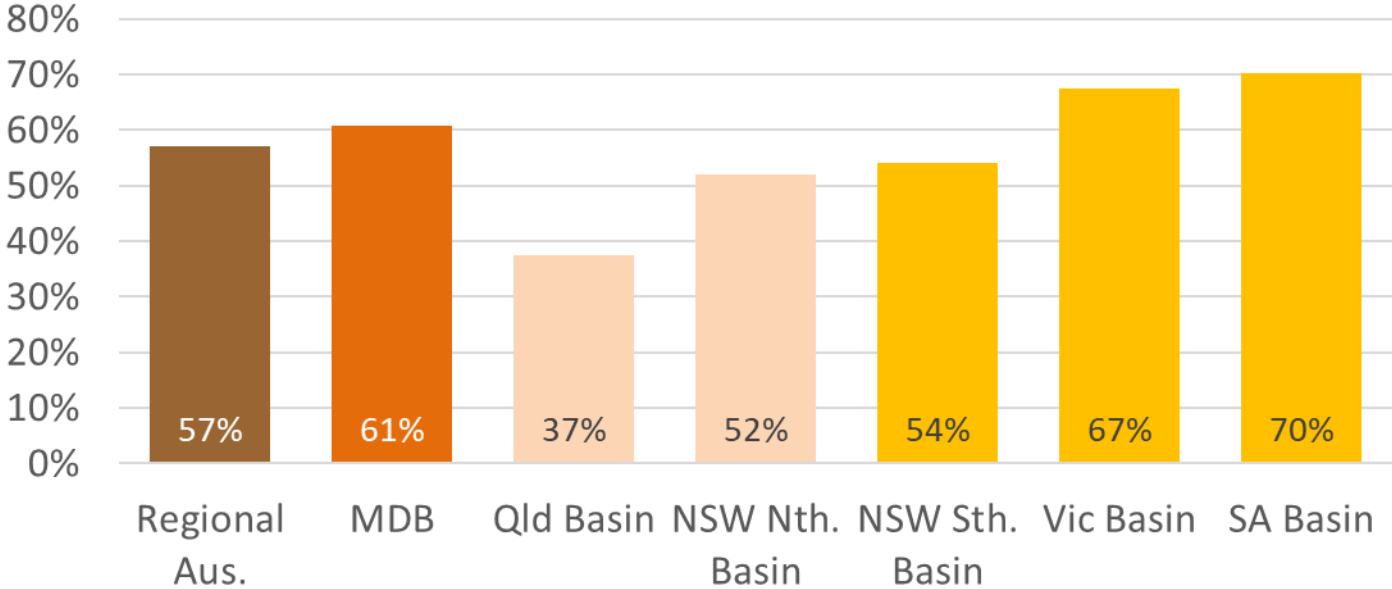
The process of recovering from disaster has caused tension or disagreement between some people in my community (% agree)



Tension and disagreement are common challenges for disaster recovery.

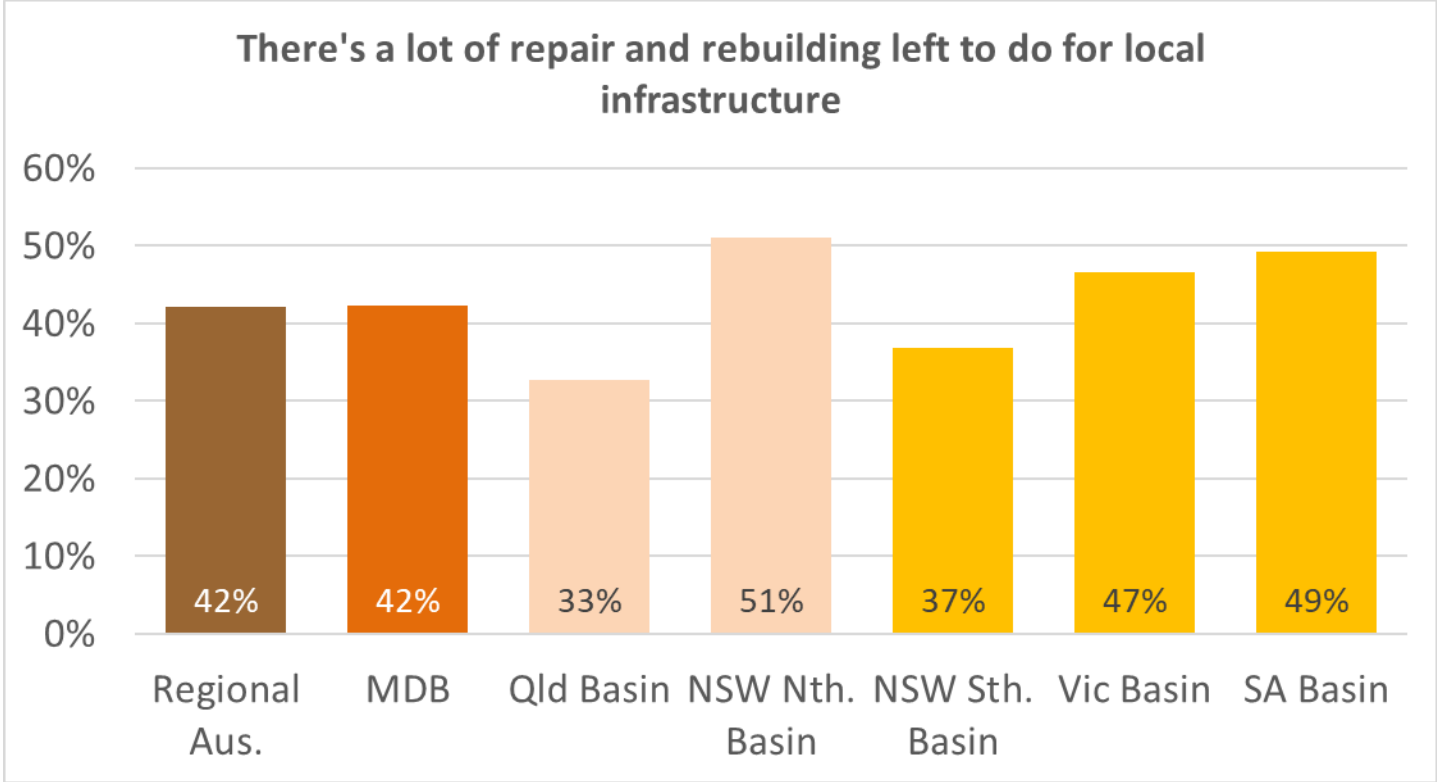
Drought and disaster resilience and recovery

Many people are experiencing high levels of fatigue or burnout from working to support those impacted by disasters (% agree)



An even bigger challenge is fatigue and burnout amongst those working to support recovery.

Drought and disaster resilience and recovery



Are we building back better? Sometimes, with many communities reporting improvements in rebuilt infrastructure.

Key takeaways

- People love their Basin communities – particularly amenity, friendliness
- Housing affordability, cost of living challenges are increasingly threatening liveability
- Access to services & infrastructure continue to challenge liveability
- Basin residents are used to a variable climate – but our models of disaster response and recovery need to continue to rapidly evolve
- Everything interacts
 - Cost of living challenges are reducing disaster resilience & capability

What's coming next?

In November 2023, we are surveying Basin communities about community conditions - and how these conditions change with water availability and quality:

- Security & quality of town & domestic water supply
- Future of their livelihoods & ability to make investment decisions
- Future water availability
- Water management & collaboration between agencies
- Ability to care for health of the environment
- Ability to recreate in and around waterways

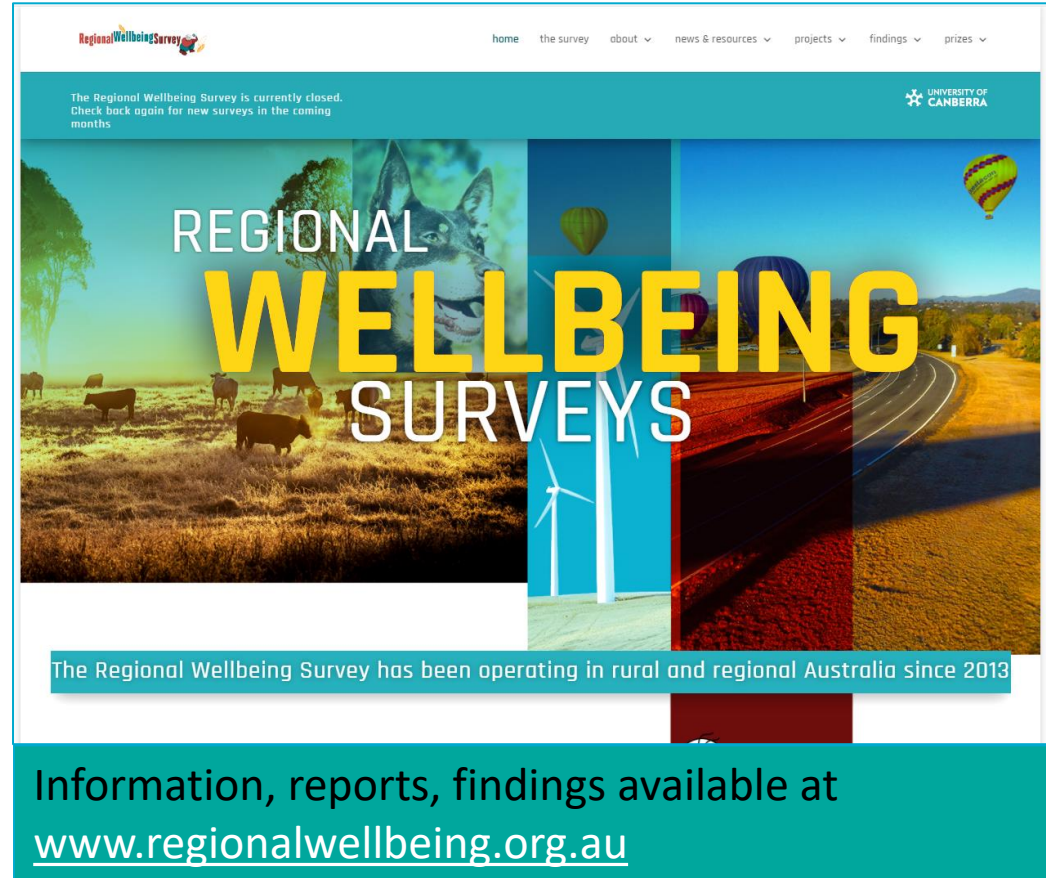
Keep an eye on **regionalwellbeing.org.au** for more info & to do the survey

Regional Wellbeing Survey

About the RWS

Data & reports from 10
years of surveys
available at
regionalwellbeing.org.au

Data presented today
will be published end
October



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Regional Wellbeing Survey website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for 'home', 'the survey', 'about', 'news & resources', 'projects', 'findings', and 'prizes'. Below the navigation is a teal banner with the text: 'The Regional Wellbeing Survey is currently closed. Check back again for new surveys in the coming months.' The University of Canberra logo is in the top right corner. The main content area features a large, colorful collage of images including a dog's face, a hot air balloon, a wind turbine, a road, and a field with cows. Overlaid on this collage is the text 'REGIONAL WELLBEING SURVEYS' in large, bold, yellow and white letters. Below the collage is a teal banner with the text: 'The Regional Wellbeing Survey has been operating in rural and regional Australia since 2013'. At the bottom of the page, there is a teal banner with the text: 'Information, reports, findings available at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au'.