

Reports from the front line: Compliance and enforcement of non-urban water extractions in NSW

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Compliance and enforcement (C&E) represents the pointy end of national water policy. Without effective C&E, many other policy approaches may be rendered impotent. And yet there has been very little comprehensive investigation of C&E among water users. This project reports on how water users have responded to regulation, including their (i) motivations for complying with legal obligations; (ii) views and experiences with the NSW Office of Water's C&E policies and practices; (iii) sources of information and its perceived usefulness; and (iv) knowledge of water regulations and resources. Draws on a quantitative survey of approximately 4,000 NSW water licence holders, and supplementary face-to-face interviews (50 landholders/stakeholders). Three catchments/regions were studied, namely: (i) Central West (CW); (ii) Murray and Murrumbidgee (MM); and (iii) Richmond, North Coast (NC). These regions were deliberately chosen to represent a diversity of: (i) water sources (rivers and groundwater); (ii) locations (inland and coastal); and (iii) authorisations (e.g. licences, approvals and stock and domestic). (i) Motivations – most support the need for regulation. Fairness, social reputation, peer reputation and morals rank highly as motivators, unlike penalties. Economic advantage is seen as the main reason for illegal extraction. (ii) Experiences – few have experience with compliance officers, but of those that have, most have a negative view. Most support tougher enforcement. (iii) Communication/education – most claim they do not get enough information, and want more, and prefer traditional media and trust neighbours/family/peers. (iv) Knowledge/resources – most have little knowledge of broad policy and regulation, but good knowledge of what impacts them. There is room to tailor communication and education strategies around C&E, including leveraging peers and third parties; enhance the inspectoral presence; emphasise procedural fairness; increase awareness of enforcement actions/penalties; and provide guidance on how best to comply and the benefits of compliance.