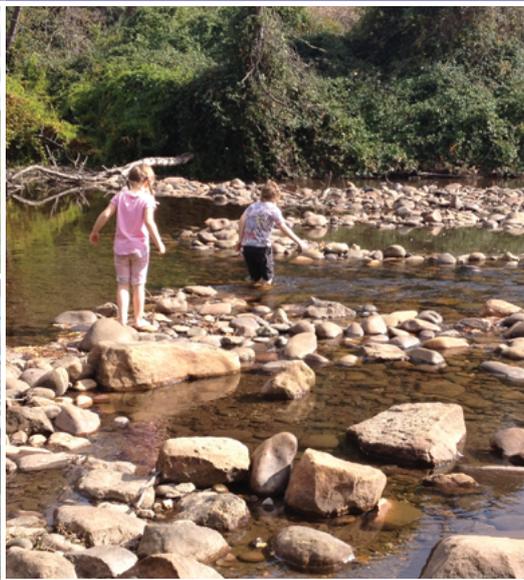


THE 2015 REGIONAL WELLBEING SURVEY

WELLBEING, RESILIENCE AND LIVEABILITY IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

JUNE 2016



Authors: Jacki Schirmer^{1,2}, Brigitta Yabsley¹, Melinda Mylek¹, Dominic Peel¹

¹ Centre for Research and Action in Public Health, Health Research Institute, University of Canberra

² Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra

Wellbeing, resilience and liveability in rural and regional Australia

The 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey

June 2016

Jacki Schirmer^{1,2}, Brigitta Yabsley¹, Melinda Mylek¹, Dominic Peel¹

¹Centre for Research and Action in Public Health, Health Research Institute, University of Canberra

²Institute for Applied Ecology, University of Canberra

ISBN number 978-1-74088-434-1

Title: Wellbeing, resilience and liveability in regional Australia: The 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey.

Authors: Schirmer, Jacki; Yabsley, Brigitta; Mylek, Melinda; Peel, Dominic.

Publication date: June 2016

Preferred citation: Schirmer, J.; Yabsley, B.; Mylek, M. and Peel, D. 2016. Wellbeing, resilience and liveability in regional Australia: The 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey. University of Canberra, Canberra.

Acknowledgments

The Regional Wellbeing Survey is a project that relies on the input and contributions of many different individuals, groups and organisations.

In particular, it relies on rural and regional Australians choosing to take part in the survey. We thank the 13,300 people who took the time to complete the survey in 2015.

The scale at which the Regional Wellbeing Survey is realised would not be possible without support from our funding partners. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the organisations who contributed funding to the 2015 survey: (i) the University of Canberra, (ii) the Victorian Department of Economic Development, Land, Transport and Resources, (iii) the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, (iv) Murray Local Land Services, (v) the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, (vi) the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, (vii) Clarence City Council, (viii) Bega Valley Shire Council, and (ix) the Australian National University.

The survey relies on the support of the large number of rural and regional organisations who provide in-kind support, including promoting the survey through their networks, providing advice and feedback on survey content, and helping guide the survey's future. We extend our thanks to all our survey supporters, listed on the next page. In particular, we recognise the time they invest in collaborating with the Regional Wellbeing Survey team to ensure the survey results assists regional and rural organisations in fostering and improving wellbeing in rural and regional communities.

We thank our colleagues Ivan Hanigan and Kimberly Brown for their contribution to reviewing and editing the report.

We would also like to thank other staff at the University of Canberra for their contribution towards the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey. In particular, we would like to thank the following (in alphabetical order): Caitlin Currie, Tumendelger Erdenebayar, Callum Johnston, Vincent Learnihan, Tanya McGill, Nishant Patra, Laura Peel, Robert Tanton, and Viveka Turnbull-Hocking.

Survey partners & supporters

Our survey partners and supporters provide funding and in-kind support to the survey. We acknowledge the contributions of these organisations (in alphabetical order).

- Adelaide Hills Council
- Armidale Dumaresq Council
- Australian Livestock & Property Agents Association Ltd
- Australian National University
- Balranald Shire Council
- Baw Baw Shire Council
- Bega Valley Shire Council
- Bland Shire Council
- Blue Mountains City Council
- Bombala Council
- Broome Council
- Buloke Shire Council
- Byron Shire Council
- Carrathool Shire Council
- Centacare Cairns
- Central Coast Council
- Central Highlands Regional Council
- Cessnock City Council
- Charters Towers Regional Council
- Circular Head Council
- City of Ballarat
- City of Greater Bendigo
- City of Greater Geraldton
- City of Victor Harbor
- City of Wagga Wagga
- Clarence City Council
- Common Purpose Group
- Coonamble Council
- Coorong District Council
- Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
- Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning
- Derwent Valley Council
- District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula
- District Council of the Copper Coast
- Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority
- Great Lakes Council
- Great Southern Development Commission
- Greater Hume Shire Council
- Gundagai Council
- Guyra Shire Council
- GV Community Energy
- Gwydir Shire Council
- Gympie Regional Council
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Irrigation Australia Ltd
- Lachlan Shire Council
- Landcare NSW
- Latrobe City
- Lockyer Valley Regional Council
- Longreach Regional Council
- Maranoa Regional Council
- Mid Murray Council
- Milang & District Community Association Inc.
- Mitchell Shire Council
- Mount Gambier Council
- Mount Gambier Police
- Murray Local Land Services
- Murray Shire Council
- Murray-Darling Basin Authority
- Murraylands and Riverland Regional Development Authority
- National Farmers' Federation
- National Rural Health Alliance
- Natural Resources Adelaide & Mt Lofty Ranges
- NSW Office of Environment and Heritage
- Parkes Shire Council
- Port Augusta City Council
- RDA Far North Qld & Torres Strait Inc.

- RDA Limestone Coast
- RDA South West
- Regional Arts Victoria
- Regional Australia Institute
- RDA Darling Downs and South West
- Regional Development Victoria
- Rural City of Murray Bridge
- Shellharbour City Council
- Shire of Campaspe
- Shire of Perenjori
- Shire of Plantagenet
- Shire of Wiluna
- Somerset Regional Council
- South East Natural Resource Management Board
- Temora Shire Council
- Tenterfield Shire Council
- The Barossa Council
- The District Council of Mount Barker
- Toodyay Shire Council
- Toowoomba Regional Council
- Townsville Private Clinic
- Victorian Department of Economic Development, Land, Transport and Resources
- Wagait Shire Council
- Wattle Range Council
- Wellington Shire Council
- Wheatbelt Natural Resource Management.

Contents

Acknowledgments	i
<i>Survey partners & supporters</i>	<i>ii</i>
Executive Summary	ix
Section 1: About the Regional Wellbeing Survey	1
1.1 Introduction	1
<i>Wellbeing in rural and regional communities</i>	1
<i>The Regional Wellbeing Survey</i>	2
<i>Our reports</i>	2
<i>Partner projects</i>	3
1.2 Methods	4
<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>Designing survey questions</i>	4
<i>Collecting survey data</i>	6
<i>Survey responses</i>	13
<i>Representativeness of responses</i>	13
<i>Data preparation & analysis</i>	16
<i>Strengths and weaknesses</i>	19
<i>Ethics</i>	20
1.3. Survey regions	21
Section 2: Wellbeing	22
2.1 Wellbeing of people	23
<i>What did we measure and why?</i>	24
<i>Wellbeing of rural and regional Australians: comparing the three measures</i>	25
<i>Global life satisfaction</i>	27
<i>Personal Wellbeing Index</i>	37
<i>Worthwhileness - Feeling life is worthwhile</i>	48
<i>Conclusions</i>	54
.....	55
2.2 Wellbeing of communities	56
<i>What did we measure and why?</i>	56
<i>Community Wellbeing Index</i>	58
<i>Changes in community liveability</i>	67
<i>Community reputation</i>	80
<i>Migration intentions</i>	82
<i>Conclusions</i>	86
Section 3 Resilience and liveability: exploring determinants of wellbeing	87
3.1 Financial capital	90
<i>Household financial wellbeing</i>	90
<i>Community economic wellbeing</i>	101
3.2 Human capital	108
<i>Health – overall health</i>	108
<i>Health – psychological distress</i>	112
<i>Self-efficacy</i>	117
<i>Community leadership and collaboration</i>	121
3.3 Institutional capital	128
<i>Having a say and being heard</i>	128
<i>Equity and inclusion</i>	134
.....	139
3.4 Social capital	140
<i>Spending time with friends and family</i>	140
<i>Getting involved</i>	146
<i>Sense of belonging</i>	157
3.5 Physical capital	165
<i>Access to health, education, aged and child care</i>	165

<i>Access to roads and public transport</i>	171
<i>Access to food and retail shops</i>	175
<i>Access to financial and professional services</i>	180
<i>Telecommunications</i>	185
<i>Crime and safety in the local community</i>	191
<i>Landscape and aesthetics</i>	197
3.6 Natural capital	203
<i>Perceived environmental health</i>	203
Section 4.0 Discussion and conclusions	209
Wellbeing, resilience and liveability in regional Australia in 2015	209
<i>What aspects of wellbeing, resilience and liveability are strongest and poorest in regional Australia?</i>	209
<i>Where are wellbeing, resilience and liveability strongest and poorest?</i>	212
<i>Who is experiencing better and poorer wellbeing, resilience and liveability?</i>	216
<i>Conclusions</i>	219
References	220
Appendix 1 Cut-off scores for quartiles	224

Figures

Figure 1.2a Number of survey responses received, by Regional Development Australia region	14
Figure 1.2b Comparison of Global Life Satisfaction scores reported by survey participants recruited principally by (i) flyer and (ii) email	16
Figure 1.2c Interpreting confidence intervals.....	18
Figure 2.1a Wellbeing of rural and regional Australians in 2015 – comparison of three measures	25
Figure 2.1b Wellbeing of rural and regional Australians, compared for 2014 and 2015.....	26
Figure 2.1c Global Life Satisfaction, 2013 to 2015, by state.....	28
Figure 2.1d Global Life Satisfaction, 2015, by state	29
Figure 2.1e Global Life Satisfaction, 2015, by region	31
Figure 2.1f Global Life Satisfaction, 2015, proportion of population reporting <i>lower</i> than average life satisfaction	32
Figure 2.1g Global Life Satisfaction, 2015, proportion of population reporting <i>higher</i> than average life satisfaction	33
Figure 2.1h Change in Global Life Satisfaction, 2014 to 2015, by region.....	34
Figure 2.1i Global Life Satisfaction, 2015, by group.....	36
Figure 2.1j Personal Wellbeing Index, 2015, by state	38
Figure 2.1k Personal Wellbeing Index, 2015, by region	39
Figure 2.1l Personal Wellbeing Index, 2015, proportion of population reporting <i>lower</i> than average wellbeing.....	40
Figure 2.1m Personal Wellbeing Index, 2015, proportion of population reporting <i>higher</i> than average wellbeing	41
Figure 2.1n Change in the Personal Wellbeing Index, 2014 to 2015, by region.....	42
Figure 2.1o Personal Wellbeing Index, 2015, by group.....	43
Figure 2.1p Average level of satisfaction with different aspects of life, rural and regional Australia (n=12192).....	44
Figure 2.1q Satisfaction with different aspects of life, 2015, by state.....	46
Figure 2.1r Satisfaction with different aspects of life, 2015, by group	47
Figure 2.1s Feeling life is worthwhile, 2015, by state	49
Figure 2.1t Feeling life is worthwhile, 2015, by region	50
Figure 2.1u Feeling life is worthwhile, 2015, proportion of population reporting <i>lower</i> than average life worthwhileness	51
Figure 2.1v Feeling life is worthwhile, 2015, proportion of population reporting <i>higher</i> than average life worthwhileness	52
Figure 2.1w Feeling life is worthwhile, 2015, by group.....	53
Figure 2.2a Community Wellbeing Index, 2013 to 2015, by state.....	59
Figure 2.2b Community Wellbeing Index, 2015, by state	60
Figure 2.2c Community Wellbeing Index, 2015, by region.....	61
Figure 2.2d Community Wellbeing Index, 2015, proportion of population reporting <i>lower</i> than average scores	62
Figure 2.2e Community Wellbeing Index, 2015, proportion of population reporting <i>higher</i> than average scores	63
Figure 2.2f Changes in the CWI, 2014 to 2015, by region	64
Figure 2.2g Community Wellbeing Index, 2015, by group	66
Figure 2.2h Changes in community liveability, 2015, rural and regional Australia	67
Figure 2.2i Changes in liveability of local communities, by state	68
Figure 2.2j Changes in liveability of local communities, by region	69
Figure 2.2k Changes in liveability of local communities, by group	70
Figure 2.2l Changes in friendliness of local communities, by state	71
Figure 2.2m Changes in friendliness of local communities, by region.....	72

Figure 2.2n Changes in friendliness of local communities, by group.....	73
Figure 2.2o Changes in local landscape and surrounds, by state	74
Figure 2.2p Changes in local landscape and surrounds, by region	75
Figure 2.2q Changes in local landscape and surrounds, by group.....	76
Figure 2.2r Changes in the local economy, by state	77
Figure 2.2s Changes in the local economy, by region	78
Figure 2.2t Changes in the local economy, by group	79
Figure 2.2u Proportion of residents who would recommend their community as a good place to live, by state and group.....	80
Figure 2.2v Proportion of residents who would recommend their community as a good place to live, by region	81
Figure 2.2w Proportion of residents who are likely to move in the next 12 months, by state and group.....	83
Figure 2.2x Proportion of residents who felt they were likely to move in the next 12 months, by region	83
Figure 2.2y Proportion of residents who had considered moving in the past three years but decided not to, by state and group	84
Figure 2.2z Proportion of residents who had considered moving in the past three years but decided not to, by region.....	85
Figure 3.1a Household financial wellbeing, 2015, by state.....	93
Figure 3.1b Household financial wellbeing, 2015, by region.....	94
Figure 3.1c Comparison of average household financial wellbeing, 2014 and 2015, by region	95
Figure 3.1d Household financial wellbeing, 2015, by group	96
Figure 3.1e Types of financial stress events experienced by rural and regional Australians in the previous 12 months.....	97
Figure 3.1f Cumulative financial stress: how many rural and regional Australians experienced multiple forms of financial stress in previous 12 months?	98
Figure 3.1g Average number of financial stresses experienced in last 12 months, by state and group	99
Figure 3.1h Average number of financial stresses experienced in last 12 months, by state and group	100
Figure 3.1i Community economic wellbeing in rural and regional Australia, 2015.....	102
Figure 3.1j Community economic wellbeing, 2015, by state	103
Figure 3.1k Community economic wellbeing, 2015, by region	104
Figure 3.1l Comparison of average community economic wellbeing, 2014 and 2015, by region	105
Figure 3.1m Community economic wellbeing, 2015, by group	106
Figure 3.2a General health, 2015, by state.....	109
Figure 3.2b General health, 2015, by region, proportion of residents reporting 'poor' or 'fair' health	110
Figure 3.2c General health, 2015, by group	111
Figure 3.2d Psychological distress (K10 measure), 2015, by state	114
Figure 3.2e Psychological distress (K10 measure), 2015, by region – proportion of population reporting very high distress	115
Figure 3.2f Psychological distress (K10 measure), 2015, by group.....	116
Figure 3.2g Self-efficacy, 2015, by state.....	118
Figure 3.2h Self-efficacy, 2015, by region.....	119
Figure 3.2i Self-efficacy, 2015, by group	120
Figure 3.2j Community leadership and collaboration, 2015, rural and regional Australia	122
Figure 3.2k Community leadership and collaboration, 2015, by state	123
Figure 3.2l Community leadership and collaboration, 2015, by region.....	124
Figure 3.2m Comparison of average confidence in community leadership and collaboration, 2014 and 2015, by region.....	125
Figure 3.2n Community leadership and collaboration, 2015, by group	126
Figure 3.3a Institutional capital, 2015, rural and regional Australia.....	129

Figure 3.3b Having a say and being heard, 2015, by state	130
Figure 3.3c Having a say and being heard, 2015, by region	131
Figure 3.3d Comparison of average confidence in being able to have a say and be heard, 2014 and 2015, by region	132
Figure 3.3e Having a say and being heard, 2015, by group	133
Figure 3.3f Equity and inclusion, 2015, rural and regional Australia	135
Figure 3.3g Equity and inclusion, 2015, by state	136
Figure 3.3h Equity and inclusion, 2015, by region	137
Figure 3.3i Equity and inclusion, 2015, by group	138
Figure 3.4a Spending time with friends and family, 2015, rural and regional Australia	141
Figure 3.4b Spending time with friends and family (informal social connectedness), 2015, by state	142
Figure 3.4c Spending time with friends and family (informal social connectedness), 2015, by region	143
Figure 3.4d Comparison of time spent with family and friends, 2014 and 2015, by region	144
Figure 3.4e Spending time with friends and family (informal social connectedness), 2015, by group	145
Figure 3.4f Community involvement, 2015, rural and regional Australia	147
Figure 3.4g Getting involved in community activities, 2015, by state	148
Figure 3.4h Getting involved in community activities, 2015, by region	149
Figure 3.4i Comparison of level of involvement in community activities, 2014 and 2015, by region	150
Figure 3.4j Getting involved in community activities, 2015, by group	151
Figure 3.4k Volunteering, 2015, by state	152
Figure 3.4l Volunteering, 2015, by region	153
Figure 3.4m Volunteering, 2015, by group	154
Figure 3.4n Types of volunteering engaged in by those who volunteered in their community	155
Figure 3.4o Wellbeing and volunteering, 2015	156
Figure 3.4p Sense of belonging, 2015, rural and regional Australia	157
Figure 3.4q Sense of belonging, 2015, by state	159
Figure 3.4r Sense of belonging, 2015, by region	160
Figure 3.4s Comparison of sense of belonging to local community, 2014 and 2015, by region	161
Figure 3.4t Sense of belonging, 2015, by group	162
Figure 3.5a Access to health, education, aged and child care, 2015, rural and regional Australia	167
Figure 3.5b Access to health, education, aged and child care, 2015 by state	168
Figure 3.5c Access to health, education, aged and child care, 2015, by region	169
Figure 3.5d Access to health, education, aged and child care, 2015, by group	170
Figure 3.5e Access to roads and public transport, 2015, rural and regional Australia	171
Figure 3.5f Access to roads and public transport, 2015, by state	172
Figure 3.5g Access to roads and public transport, 2015, by region	173
Figure 3.5h Access to roads and public transport, 2015, by group	174
Figure 3.5i Access to food and retail, 2015, rural and regional Australia	175
Figure 3.5j Access to food and retail, 2015, by state	177
Figure 3.5k Access to food and retail, 2015, by region	178
Figure 3.5l Access to food and retail, 2015, by group	179
Figure 3.5m Access to financial and professional services, 2015, rural and regional Australia	181
Figure 3.5n Access to financial and professional services, 2015, by state	182
Figure 3.5o Access to financial and professional services, 2015, by region	183
Figure 3.5p Access to financial & professional services, 2015, by group	184
Figure 3.5q Access to telecommunication, 2015, rural and regional Australia	185
Figure 3.5r Access to telecommunications, 2015, by state	187
Figure 3.5s Access to telecommunications, 2015, by region	188
Figure 3.5t Comparison of access to telecommunications, 2014 and 2015, by region	189

Figure 3.5u Access to telecommunications, 2015, by group	190
Figure 3.5v Crime and safety, 2015, rural and regional Australia	191
Figure 3.5w Crime and safety, 2015, by state	193
Figure 3.5x Crime and safety, 2015, by region	194
Figure 3.5y Comparison of views about local crime and safety, 2014 and 2015, by region	195
Figure 3.5z Crime and Safety, 2015, by group	196
Figure 3.5aa Landscape and aesthetics, 2015, rural and regional Australia	197
Figure 3.5ab Landscape and aesthetics, 2015, by state	199
Figure 3.5ac Landscape and aesthetics, 2015, by region	200
Figure 3.5ad Comparison of views about local landscape and aesthetics, 2014 and 2015, by region	201
Figure 3.5ae Landscape and aesthetics, 2015, by group	202
Figure 3.6a Perceived environmental health, 2015, rural and regional Australia	205
Figure 3.6b Perceived environmental health, 2015, by state	206
Figure 3.6c Perceived environmental health, 2015, by region	207
Figure 3.6d Perceived environmental health, 2015, by group	208

Tables

Table 1.2a Topics included in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey – asked of all types of respondents	7
Table 1.2b Topics included in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey – asked of farmers only, with results to be reported in our ‘Farming and agriculture’ report	8
Table 1.2c Methods used to recruit participants in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey, in descending order of importance	12
Table 1.2d Comparison of Regional Wellbeing Survey respondents to characteristics of rural and regional Australians	15
Table 4.1 Wellbeing in different regions: which regions scored above and below the rural and regional Australian average in 2015?	213
Table 4.2 Individual/household resilience and liveability in different regions: which regions scored above and below the rural and regional Australian average in 2015?	214
Table 4.3 Community scale resilience and liveability in different regions: which regions scored above and below the rural and regional Australian average in 2015?	215
Table 4.4 Wellbeing of different groups: which types of people scored above and below the rural and regional Australian average in 2015?	217
Table 4.5 Individual/household resilience and liveability for different groups: which types of people scored above and below the rural and regional Australian average in 2015?	217
Table 4.3 Community scale resilience and liveability: which types of people reported good and poor access to community resources in 2015?	218
Table A1 Cut-off scores used for 25 th percentile and 75% percentiles throughout report	224

Executive Summary

Introduction

Internationally, there is growing recognition that measuring societal progress should involve measuring wellbeing: identifying whether people are able to lead meaningful, happy and fulfilled lives is just as, if not more, important than understanding economic growth. Despite this recognition, there remains limited data tracking wellbeing, particularly in rural and regional areas with smaller populations.

The Regional Wellbeing Survey was launched in 2013 to examine the wellbeing of people living in rural and regional areas of Australia. The survey is conducted annually, and measures the subjective wellbeing of people and communities living outside Australia's major cities. It also examines resilience of rural and regional residents and the liveability of their communities, and looks at how rural and regional Australians are experiencing a wide range of changes occurring in their communities.

This report examines the results of the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey, focusing on wellbeing, liveability, and resilience. Further reports will be released from the 2015 survey, including reports focusing on experiences of drought, the wellbeing of farmers, natural resource management, and water reform. The Regional Wellbeing Survey team is also partnering with other groups conducting large scale surveys, to ensure we can broaden the information available on wellbeing of different people and communities.

Methods

The topics included in the Regional Wellbeing Survey each year are selected based on consultation with a wide range of rural and regional organisations. Some survey topics are asked every year, while others are included only occasionally. Participants can complete the survey online or on paper. Survey participants are recruited principally using flyers and paper surveys distributed to letter boxes, and emails to prior survey participants; in addition, many rural and regional organisations also promote the survey, and a survey prize draw is offered. In 2015, a total of 13,303 people took part in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey, with the number of respondents growing by just over 1,000 compared to the 2014 survey (completed by 12,125 people), and by 4,000 compared to the 2013 survey (completed by 9,135 respondents). Data presented in this report have, unless otherwise specified, been weighted to be representative of the rural and regional Australian population: this weighting addresses both deliberate over-sampling of farmers and people in some regions, as well as unintentional over-sampling of women and older people. Confidence intervals are presented throughout the report to provide a guide to statistically significant differences between different groups of people, and people living in different regions. Like any survey, the data presented in this report has limitations and caveats. Key amongst these are that some groups may be under-represented even after weighting of data, and missing data have not been imputed.

Accessing data

In this report, we show results of the survey for people living in different states and Regional Development Australia regions. More detailed data can be downloaded from www.regionalwellbeing.org.au in the form of data tables showing results for the following geographic regions: (i) local government areas (where adequate responses were received), (ii) Regional Development Australia regions, and (iii) natural resource management regions.

Wellbeing of people

The Regional Wellbeing Survey examines both the wellbeing of people and the wellbeing of communities as a whole. When considering people, wellbeing is defined as a state in which a person is able to realise their own potential and contribute to their community.

Three indicators were used to examine the wellbeing of people: Global Life Satisfaction (GLS), the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and Worthwhileness. The GLS and PWI measures are 'hedonic' measures that examine how pleasurable people find life, whereas the Worthwhileness measure examines how meaningful people find their life, in the form of feeling the things they are doing in their lives are worthwhile. Most rural and regional Australians report feeling satisfied with their lives, with 70% feeling highly satisfied with their life. Even more (79%) reported they felt the things they did in life were worthwhile, suggesting that a small but significant proportion of rural and regional Australians feel they are achieving worthwhile things in their life even though they are not highly satisfied with their life overall.

The PWI can be examined by different wellbeing 'domains', as it asks how satisfied a person is with several different aspects of their life. In 2015, rural and regional Australians were most commonly satisfied with how safe they felt, their standard of living and their personal relationships; they reported lower satisfaction with their health, future security and what they were currently achieving in life.

There was little difference in the wellbeing of people living in different states, although Tasmanians reported slightly poorer wellbeing on some measures compared to those living elsewhere. The average GLS and PWI scores across rural and regional Australia, and for individual states, did not change significantly between 2014 and 2015; in a small number of regions there were significant changes.

Women, those aged 65 and older, and farmers (both dryland and irrigating) were more likely to report high levels of wellbeing compared to the national average. People who were not in employment, and those aged 30 to 49, have lower wellbeing on average compared to other groups.

Wellbeing (liveability) of communities

Communities with higher wellbeing (liveability) are those which successfully support high quality of life for all their residents. Four measures of overall community wellbeing were included in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey:

- the Community Wellbeing Index (CWI), which asks a person to rate how their community performs in supporting their quality of life into the future
- changes in local liveability, in which survey participants rate whether their community's liveability, friendliness, economy and landscape are getting better or worse
- community reputation, in which participants are asked if they would recommend their community to others as a place to live, and
- migration intentions, in which participants were asked if they were considering migrating to live in a new community.

Similar to previous years, Queenslanders and people aged under 30 had lower CWI scores compared to other regions and groups; these two groups also reported poorer outcomes when asked about how liveability was changing and community reputation.

Just over half of rural and regional Australians felt that their community's friendliness (55%), liveability (51%) and local landscape and surrounds (56%) were changing for the better; only 18-23% felt each of these changing for the worse. Queensland residents and dryland farmers (and, to a lesser extent, irrigators) were more likely than other rural and regional Australians to feel the liveability, friendliness and local landscape in their local community was declining. Tasmanians were

more likely than people living in other states to feel each of these were improving. Forty two per cent of rural and regional Australians felt their economy was worsening, particularly those living in Queensland and Western Australia and dryland farmers; only 31% of people across rural and regional Australia felt that economic conditions were improving in their local community.

Almost three quarters of rural and regional Australians (73%) would recommend their community to others as a good place to live, particularly Victorians (77%) and residents of New South Wales (78%). Queenslanders were significantly less likely to say they would recommend their community to others (63%), as were people aged under 30 (64%).

Examining migration intentions sheds somewhat different light on community wellbeing. Across rural and regional Australia, 7.5% of people believed they were likely or very likely to shift to a new community in the next 12 months: those most likely to shift were people aged under 30, men, and those living in Western Australia and New South Wales. People aged 65 and older, women, irrigators, and those living in Tasmania were least likely to be planning to shift to a new community. Just over two thirds (38%) of rural and regional Australians had considered shifting to a new community at some point within the past three years but decided not to: the types of people who had considered shifting were very similar to those who reported intending to migrate in the next 12 months. While migration intentions correspond to some degree with findings from other measures of community wellbeing, they also differ in some cases. For example, despite giving overall poorer ratings for community wellbeing, Queenslanders were not more likely to be planning to migrate compared to those living in other parts of rural and regional Australia, although they were more likely than most others to report having considered shifting to a new community at some point in the last three years.

Resilience and liveability: exploring determinants of wellbeing

Many factors influence wellbeing. Particularly important amongst these are the things that help build resilience of people and communities, and make communities more liveable. Resilience and liveability have many dimensions. Each year, the Regional Wellbeing Survey examines many factors that are commonly argued to help build resilience and liveability. To do this, we examine the extent to which rural and regional Australians have access to financial capital, human capital, institutional capital, social capital, physical capital and natural capital.

Financial capital

Financial capital refers to the financial resources available to people and communities, which help them cope with difficult times, and also enables them to take advantage of new opportunities when they emerge. Having access to financial resources is important to the wellbeing of both people and communities. At the household level, financial resources are critical to quality of life of the people living in that household. At the community level, economic activity levels and local living costs are key indicators of the future of a rural community.

Household financial wellbeing

Financial wellbeing is not a function solely of income, but also depends on living costs and other factors: because of this, we examine both household income and how people self-rate their household's overall financial position when measuring household financial wellbeing. In 2015, people living in Western Australia reported slightly higher household financial wellbeing, and those in South Australia slightly lower household financial wellbeing, compared to those living in other states. Those aged 65 and older, those aged 18-29, and those not in paid employment, reported poorer household financial wellbeing compared to those aged 30 to 64, and those in paid

employment. Farmers reported poor financial wellbeing compared to those who were employed in occupations other than farming.

However, not all farmers reported the same level of financial wellbeing, with irrigators on average reporting poorer household financial wellbeing than dryland farmers.

In addition to asking about financial wellbeing, survey participants were asked if they had experienced any of ten forms of financial distress in the last 12 months, ranging from being unable to buy non-food items such as clothes, to being unable to heat or cool their home, and asking for help from a welfare or community organisation. In total, 44% of rural and regional Australians reported experiencing some form of financial stress in the last 12 months. Most of these reported experiencing one or two types of financial stress: very few reported experiencing four or more. The most common financial stresses reported were skipping planned social events, being unable to take planned holidays, and difficulty affording non-food expenses. Between 4% and 5% of people reported experiencing severe financial stress events, such as being unable to pay mortgage or rent on time, or going without food. Women reported experiencing significantly more financial stress than men. However, people aged under 50 and those not in employment were most likely to experience financial stress, while age- and employment-related differences were typically larger than gender-based differences. Those aged 65 and older and farmers were least likely to report experiencing financial stress.

Community economic wellbeing

Economic health is critical to the overall resilience and liveability of rural and regional communities. Across rural and regional Australia, 41% of people felt living costs were affordable in their local community, while 35% disagreed. Only 24% of rural and regional Australians felt local businesses were doing well in their region, while just over half (51%) disagreed; similarly, 22% felt their community was financially well-off and 56% disagreed. The measure on which local economies across rural and regional Australia were rated poorest was jobs: 77% of rural and regional Australians disagreed that there were plenty of jobs in their local economy.

People living in rural and regional areas of Victoria had, on average, the most positive views about the health of their local economy, followed by those in Tasmania and New South Wales. Those living in Queensland reported the lowest levels of community economic wellbeing, much lower than for all other states, while Western Australians had slightly lower confidence in local economic wellbeing compared to most other rural and regional Australians.

People who were not employed were more pessimistic about their local economy than people in paid employment; of employed people, farmers were more positive than non-farmers.

Human capital

Human capital can be thought of as the personal skills and resources a person can draw on to help achieve the things they want to in life. At the local community scale, human capital can be thought of as how well the community does in bringing together the skills and resources of people living in their community to help build the quality of life in their community, as well as their ability to tap into and utilise the skills and resources of people living outside their community.

A person's health and self-efficacy were used to measure the human capital available to different individuals. At the community scale, we examined how well rural and regional Australians felt their community did in bringing together the human capital of people within and outside their community to contribute to its future.

Health

A person's health – both mental and physical - is a critical contributor to their overall wellbeing. Two measures of health were analysed for this report: general health, and psychological distress.

When asked about their overall (general) health, nationally, most rural and regional Australians reported very good or excellent health (51% in 2015 compared to 52% in 2014), while 18% reported being in fair or poor health. General health was lower in South Australia and Queensland compared to other states, although in the case of Queensland this difference was not statistically significant. People who were aged 30 and younger and women reported better general health than those who were older than 30, or male. People who were not in employment were more likely to report being in poor health compared to those who were employed.

Levels of psychological distress were measured using the Kessler ten-item measure of general psychological distress. There was relatively little variation in psychological distress levels by state, although in some regions a greater proportion of residents had high distress levels, particularly the Fitzroy & Central West (Qld), Western & Northern SA, Southern Coastal Queensland, Riverina (NSW) and Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu & Kangaroo Island (SA) region. The groups least likely to report psychological distress were older people (particularly those aged 65 and older), dryland farmers, and irrigators. Those aged under 30, and those not in paid employment, were the most likely to report high distress.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to a person's confidence in their ability to achieve the things they wish to succeed when attempting specific tasks. A modified version of a widely used self-efficacy scale was included in the Regional Wellbeing Survey in 2015. Most rural and regional Australians reported relatively high levels of self-efficacy, with an average score of 5.7 out of a possible 7. Self-efficacy did not vary substantially in most states, with the exception of Tasmania, where residents had lower self-efficacy scores compared to people living in other regions. People who were not employed reported significantly lower levels of self-efficacy compared to those who were employed; people aged between 30 and 64 reported lower levels of self-efficacy compared to those aged below 30, and those aged 65 and older. Farmers reported slightly lower levels of self-efficacy on average than those who were employed in occupation other than farming.

Community leadership and collaboration

We examined whether the human capital of residents living in a community is used for the benefit of that community, by asking whether residents felt their community was doing well in the areas of leadership and collaboration. Across Australia, 60% of rural and regional Australians felt their local community groups and organisations were good at getting things done, while only 21% disagreed with this. Forty two per cent of rural and regional Australians felt their community had leaders who took the lead in addressing problems, while 35% disagreed that this was the case. Only 33% of rural and regional Australians felt their community was good at getting help and ideas from other communities, while 41% disagreed with this.

People living in New South Wales and Victoria were more likely than those living in other states to report that people in their local communities collaborated and worked together for the future of their community. Those living in Queensland, and to a lesser extent Tasmania, were less likely than those living in other states to feel confident in their community's leadership and collaboration. Dryland farmers, people aged 65 and older, and to a lesser extent those aged under 30, were most likely to feel confident in leadership and collaboration in their community, while those aged 30 to 49 had the lowest levels of confidence.

Institutional capital

Communities with high levels of institutional capital will have representative, fair, transparent, equitable and inclusive governance structures, and decision making processes that provide opportunities for all residents to have a say on issues they care about and to have their views about these issues heard. They will also have inclusive and equitable social structures.

Having a say and being heard

While most rural and regional Australians (58%) felt they were able to get involved in local decision making processes if they wished to, and most felt that people were given a fair go in their community (57%), a substantial minority did not feel confident in either of these things (25% and 22% respectively). Forty per cent did not feel their local government was able to help their community face challenges, and 47% did not believe the people making decisions for their community represented everyone in that community.

Confidence in being able to have a say and be heard was similar in most states, with the exceptions of Queensland, where confidence was lower than in other states, and South Australia, where confidence was slightly higher. Older people and farmers reported the highest levels of confidence in being able to have a say and be heard, suggesting they are better able to access decision making processes in rural and regional communities compared to other groups. Those who were not in employment had lower confidence in being able to have a say and be heard compared to those who were employed.

Equity and inclusion

Informal institutions are the cultural and social norms or rules which define how people feel able to interact with each other in a given community, and whether they feel they are treated equitably and included in their community. Across rural and regional Australia, 31% of residents felt some groups living in their community weren't made to feel welcome, and 59% felt that some groups in their community kept to themselves. People living in Western Australia were less likely than those in other states to feel their community was equitable and inclusive, and those in Tasmania were slightly more likely to. Younger people, particularly those aged under 30, were much more likely than older people to feel there was exclusion or social conflict in their community. Older people and farmers (dryland and irrigators) were much more likely than others to report feeling their communities were equitable and inclusive.

Social capital

Social capital is often described as the 'glue' that holds communities together: in communities with high levels of social capital, people have high levels of trust in each other, know that if they assist or help another person this action is likely to be reciprocated, and have strong social networks that help people work together. Many forms of social capitals matter, and the Regional Wellbeing Survey

examines three of these: (i) informal social capital (spending time with friends and family), (ii) community involvement and volunteering, and (iii) the extent to which rural and regional Australians feel a sense of belonging to their local community.

Spending time with friends and family

Most people in rural and regional Australia reported spending time with friends and family regularly, with almost two-thirds (63%) reporting they spent time with friends regularly or all the time, while 51% regularly spent time with family members who didn't live with them, and 55% regularly chatted with their neighbours. However, a substantial minority rarely or never did these things, with 20% reporting that they did not often make time to keep in touch with friends, 29% rarely or never talked with neighbours, and 33% rarely or never spent time with family members they didn't live with.

Women, people aged 65 and older, and dryland farmers were more likely than other rural and regional Australians to report that they frequently socialised with friends and family; men and those aged 30 to 49 were less likely to report this. There were relatively few differences across different states in the amount of time rural and regional Australian spent with friends and family.

Getting involved in the community and volunteering

We examined two forms of civic engagement: (i) taking part in community activities in general – meaning whether a person takes part in their community through attending local events and being a member of local organisations, and (ii) participation in volunteering.

While most rural and regional Australians (67%) regularly attend community events such as farmers markets, festivals or shows, 21% report never or rarely doing so. Fewer regularly attend arts or cultural events (43%), take part in sports groups (35%), are members of community clubs or associations such as Rotary or Lions (26%), or get involved in local interest groups or public meetings (23%). People living in Western Australia were most likely to report frequently engaging in local community activities, and those living in Tasmania and Victoria least likely to. Women, those aged 65 and older, and dryland farmers were most likely to report being involved in community activities, and men, those aged under 30, and those not in paid employment least likely to.

Three in four rural and regional Australians spent some time volunteering in the 12 months prior to completing the survey: while 25% reported they never volunteered, 30% volunteered sometimes, and 45% volunteered frequently. People living in Western Australia and South Australia were more likely to volunteer frequently than those in other states, while those living in Tasmania least likely to. Those aged 65 and older were more likely to be regular volunteers, and those aged 18 to 29 least likely to volunteer frequently, while farmers (particularly dryland farmers) were much more likely to volunteer frequently than non-farmers.

People most commonly reported volunteering for community events and sports/recreation groups, with more than 50% of volunteers reporting they volunteered for one or both of these types of groups. Between 30% and 35% volunteered for health, welfare, school, music arts or culture groups, while between 20% to 25% volunteered for natural resource management, service groups, emergency services such as volunteer fire brigades, farming organisations or their local church.

Volunteering is associated with higher wellbeing: those who reported having high levels of wellbeing were much more likely to volunteer frequently compared to those with low levels of wellbeing.

Sense of belonging

A person's sense of belonging to their local community is one measure of cognitive social capital, and is sometimes considered a measure of social cohesion. Most rural and regional Australians feel a strong sense of belonging to their community: more than 70% reported that they felt welcome in their community, felt a part of their community, and did not feel like an outsider, while 52% felt that in their community, everyone was 'in it together'. There was relatively little difference in the overall sense of belonging reported by people living in different states, although South Australians on average reported a slightly stronger sense of belonging compared to those in other states. Older people and farmers (dryland and irrigators) were more likely than other rural and regional Australians to report a high sense of belonging. Younger people were least likely to report a strong sense of belonging, particularly those aged under 30. Those who were not employed also reported a lower sense of belonging compared to those in employment.

Physical capital

The characteristics of the place a person lives in have potential to influence that person's wellbeing. These characteristics include access to services, readily available and affordable healthy food, having low levels of crime, and having a pleasant landscape, amongst others. Each year, the Regional Wellbeing Survey examines the physical capital available in different communities.

Access to health, education, aged and child care

Access to health care, education, aged care and child care facilities can be challenging in rural and regional communities, particularly in sparsely populated areas. Most rural and regional Australians (73%) felt they had good access to general health services such as general practitioners or chemists, with only 16% having poor access to these services. Two thirds (67%) of people across rural and regional Australia felt they had good access to education, 63% that they had good access to aged care, and 59% that they had good access to child care. However, half or almost half reported poor access to mental health services (46%) and specialist health services (50%), the services that were least available across rural and regional areas.

People living in Victoria and Tasmania on average reported having better access to health, education and age-related services compared to those in other states, and those in Western Australia and New South Wales reported poorer access. Men were more likely than women to feel they had good access to health, education, aged and child care services, and people aged 65 and over more likely to report good access compared to younger people. Dryland farmers reported the poorest access of any group, reflecting that they are much more likely to live on rural properties in sparsely populated areas than either non-farmers or irrigators.

Access to roads and public transport

People who live in rural and regional areas often drive longer distances than those living in large cities, but have lower quality roads and often poor access to public transport. In 2015, only 45% of rural and regional Australians felt they had access to good quality roads, and only 21% felt that they had good access to public transport. Residents of New South Wales were least likely to feel they had good access to roads and public transport, and those living in Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia most likely to. Farmers reported the poorest overall access to roads and public transport, particularly dryland farmers.

Access to food and retail shops

Having access to healthy and affordable food plays a crucial part in maintaining good health. Across rural and regional Australia, almost two-thirds of residents reported having good access to fresh fruit and vegetables; although this dropped slightly to 59% when asked about access to affordable food, and 53% when asked about retail shops more broadly. A quarter of rural and regional Australians rated their access to fresh, affordable food and retail shops as poor, suggesting substantial groups of people lack access to readily affordable healthy food.

People living in Queensland and Western Australia reported overall poorer access to food and retail shops compared to those in other state, while those in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania reported overall better access. Men were more likely than women to feel they had good access to fresh and affordable food and to retail shops. People aged 50 and older were more likely to rate their access as good compared to younger people. Dryland farmers reported the poorest overall access to food and retail shops, while irrigators reported better access than either dryland farmers or non-farmers, possibly reflecting the emphasis on food production and associated food-related industries and retail in many irrigation dependent regions.

Access to financial and professional services

Concerns have been raised about withdrawal of financial and professional services from small rural communities in Australia for many years. When asked about their access to banking, finance and professional services (such as accounting and legal advice), close to 70% of rural and regional Australians felt they had good local access to ATMs (69%) and to banking and financial services (68%). Fewer felt they had good access to professional services (55%).

People living in rural and regional areas of Queensland were less likely than those in other states to feel they had good access to banking and professional services, while Victorians were more likely to feel they had good access. There was relatively little difference in ratings of access to financial and professional services between people of different ages and gender, while dryland farmers had the poorest overall access compared to any other group.

Access to telecommunications

Improving access to telecommunications in rural Australia is a commonly discussed topic and focus of government policy. Only 37% of rural and regional Australians felt they had good access to high speed internet in 2015, while 48% felt they had poor access. When asked about mobile phone coverage, 52% felt they had good coverage, while 31% felt their local coverage was poor.

People living in Tasmania were much more likely to rate their access to telecommunications as good than those in other states (although even in Tasmania, overall access was still rated as relatively poor by many resident – just not quite as poor as in other parts of rural and regional Australia). People living in New South Wales and in Queensland reported poorer access to telecommunications compared to those living in other states.

People aged under 30 reported overall slightly better access to telecommunications than those in other age groups: this may reflect that younger people were more likely to be living in regional cities and larger towns than older people. The poorest telecommunications access was reported by dryland farmers, the large majority of whom reported poor or very poor internet and mobile phone access. Irrigators also reported poorer access on average compared to non-farmers.

Crime and safety in the local community

People who don't feel safe in the community they live in – due to fear about crime rates, drug or alcohol abuse, to name just a few – are likely to also report lower levels of wellbeing. Most rural and regional Australians (83%) felt their community was a safe place to live in 2015. However, half felt that many people in their community abused drugs (52%) or drank too much alcohol (50%), and 28% felt there was a high crime rate in their community.

Western Australians were much less likely to feel safe in their community compared to those living in other states, while those living in Tasmania and South Australia felt slightly safer on average than people living in other parts of Australia. Older people and farmers (dryland and irrigators) were more likely to report feeling safe in their local community compared to other rural and regional Australians. Younger people, particularly those aged under 30, were much more likely to report feeling unsafe than other groups, and women were slightly less likely to feel safe in their community compared to men.

Landscape and aesthetics

The majority of rural and regional Australians felt their local environment was in good condition in 2015 (74%), that there were attractive buildings in their community (70%), and that there were attractive natural parks and bushland in their local area (86%). People living in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania were more likely to find their local community aesthetically pleasing, and those living in Queensland and in Western Australia less likely to.

The older a person was, the more likely they were to find their landscape aesthetically pleasing. Dryland farmers were slightly less likely than irrigators and non-farmers to find their landscape aesthetically pleasant.

Natural capital: perceived environmental health

The natural capital of a region refers to its natural assets: the water, soil, minerals, vegetation, and fauna of a region. Survey participants were asked their views about the several aspects of environmental health in their local area; this is a measure of 'perceived environmental health', and it is important to recognise that residents' perceptions of environmental health may be different to objective measures.

Most rural and regional Australians felt that invasive weeds and feral animals were big problems in their local area, with 68% and 60% rating these as significant environmental issues in their region. Close to half felt that declining numbers of native animals or birds, loss of vegetation, or declining native fish numbers were big problems in their region. People living in Tasmania were more likely to believe their environment was healthy, and those in Queensland and New South Wales least likely to report that the local environment was in good condition. Farmers were less likely than non-farmers to rate most of the issues listed as being significant environmental problems in their region.

Conclusions

Since its inception, the findings of the Regional Wellbeing Survey have consistently shown that most rural and regional Australians enjoy living in their communities, and rate many aspects of rural and regional life highly. In 2015, most rural and regional Australians reported feeling satisfied with their lives, and felt the things they were doing in life are worthwhile. Most also rated their community's overall wellbeing and liveability as high. However, this was not the case for all regions or all types of

people: for example, while 73% of rural and regional Australians felt their community had high levels of liveability, 25% did not. Our findings highlight that Australia's rural and regional communities are considered great places to live by most of their residents, but that in some regions there are challenges that reduce resilience and liveability, particularly regions with small populations, greater remoteness, and experiencing economic downturn. Similarly, some types of people have poorer wellbeing than others: people aged under 50 report lower wellbeing and lower satisfaction with rural and regional liveability, while dryland farmers report poorer community resilience and liveability despite having relatively high levels of personal wellbeing on average.

Overall, our findings suggest that the areas in which wellbeing, resilience and liveability are strongest in Australia's rural and regional communities are attractiveness of landscape, friendliness, safety, human capital, and the opportunities provided to undertake meaningful activities such as volunteering. Rural and regional Australians mostly feel their communities are very good in these areas. Some aspects of wellbeing, resilience and liveability are experienced very differently by different people. In particular, despite a majority providing positive ratings, a significant minority of rural and regional Australians felt their community lacked equity and inclusiveness, reported low levels of social capital, had limited access to healthy and affordable food, and lacked confidence in local community leadership and collaboration. Finally, in some areas rural and regional communities were overall felt to be doing poorly by a majority of residents, particularly in economic performance, access to telecommunications, roads and public transport, and access to professional and specialist services.

Chapter 1.1: Key points

- Internationally, there is growing recognition that measuring societal progress should involve measuring wellbeing – whether people are able to lead meaningful, happy and fulfilled lives
- The Regional Wellbeing Survey was launched in 2013 to examine the wellbeing of people living in rural and regional areas of Australia, and is conducted annually
- The survey measures subjective wellbeing, multiple measures of resilience and liveability, and examines how rural and regional Australians are experiencing a wide range of changes occurring in their communities
- This report examines results of the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey, and focuses on examining wellbeing, liveability, and resilience, using a large number of indicators
- Further reports will be released from the 2015 survey, including reports focusing on experiences of drought, the wellbeing of farmers, natural resource management, and water reform
- The Regional Wellbeing Survey team is partnering with other groups conducting large scale surveys, to ensure we can broaden the information available on wellbeing of different people and communities.

Section 1: About the Regional Wellbeing Survey

This part of the report explains what the Regional Wellbeing Survey is, and how data are collected, analysed and reported. You can find out more at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

1.1 Introduction

Wellbeing in rural and regional communities

The idea of ‘wellbeing’ as a measure of progress continues to receive support worldwide. There is increasing recognition that to truly measure progress is it important to identify the extent to which people are able to lead meaningful, happy and fulfilled lives – lives with high levels of wellbeing. Many international organisations now include wellbeing as an indicator of improvement or development. Reflecting on this, the authors of the World Happiness Report wrote in 2016 that:

...we see increasing evidence that the emerging science of well-being is combining with growing policy interest at all levels of government to enable people to live sustainably happier lives. (Helliwell et al., 2016, p.7)

The word ‘wellbeing’ is used in different ways by different people, and is sometimes used interchangeably with related concepts such as ‘quality of life’, ‘life satisfaction’, ‘wellness’, ‘health’ and ‘mental health’. The wellbeing of a person or a community can be measured in many ways, and is influenced by a large number of interrelated factors. It is important to understand the many

factors that influence different aspects of wellbeing, and how different dimensions of wellbeing change over time.

While there is growing acceptance of the idea that measuring wellbeing is important, there is often limited data available on wellbeing and how it is changing over time. This is particularly the case for rural and regional areas of Australia, as many previous studies have included only small numbers of rural and regional participants. The Regional Wellbeing Survey (RWS) was initiated to help address these gaps by collecting information not available elsewhere. The data collected as part of the RWS complements other sources of information produced by a wide range of organisations.

The Regional Wellbeing Survey

The Regional Wellbeing Survey was launched in 2013 and is an annual survey of rural and regional Australians. Participation in the survey increased from 9,135 people in 2013, to 12,125 participants in 2014, and 13,303 in 2015. This report examines key findings from the 2015 survey.

The survey is conducted by researchers from the University of Canberra, who work in collaboration with a large number of community, government and health organisations to survey people across rural and regional Australia. The survey is funded by the University of Canberra and a number of organisations with an interest in the wellbeing of people and communities in rural and regional Australia.

Each year the survey asks participants about their own wellbeing and their views about the wellbeing of the community and region they live in. The survey includes a wide range of measures of wellbeing, liveability and resilience. The measures are subjective – meaning we asked people to report how they experienced different aspects of their lives and their communities. These subjective measures complement many existing objective measures of wellbeing available for rural and regional Australia, such as data describing the socio-economic conditions in different communities produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

A key aspect of the Regional Wellbeing Survey project is a commitment to principles of transparency and openness. We are committed to ensuring that all people are given the opportunity to view the results of the survey. To do this, we produce reports and tables of data and make them publicly available at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au. We do not accept funding from organisations unless they agree to all results being made publicly available. We are committed to collaborative research and provide opportunities for researchers interested in rural and regional wellbeing to analyse data from the survey, subject to strict conditions on ethical use of the data. We believe this is the best way to ensure the data collected contributes to our objective of improving wellbeing in rural and regional Australia.

Our reports

This report examines the findings of the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey on the wellbeing of people and communities. In addition to the information in this report, tables of data are produced for every community in which we received 100 or more survey responses. These can be accessed at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

We will release further reports based on the 2015 survey results, examining farmers and agriculture, drought and extreme weather events, environment and natural resource management, and environmental watering and water reform. These reports will be made available online at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au as they are released.

Partner projects

The Regional Wellbeing Survey aims to provide a better understanding of the wellbeing of people living in rural and regional Australia. However, it is not possible to design a single survey that examines all issues relevant to all groups. In many cases, there are already research groups examining the wellbeing of specific groups or communities. We believe it is important to collaborate and partner with other researchers to increase our ability to understand the wellbeing of all groups.

An example of this is our current partnership with researchers who are developing a new national survey examining the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, *Mayi kuwayu*. Each year between 100 and 150 people identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participate in the Regional Wellbeing Survey. However, this is a small sample, and the survey does not currently include some topics known to be important to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – for example, connection to country, or experiences of racism. This means that while the Regional Wellbeing Survey can provide some insight into the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, it cannot provide a comprehensive analysis. To help ensure that sources of data on the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in rural and regional Australia are available in future, we have been partnering with researchers who are experts in this area. We partnered with Dr Ray Lovett, who leads *Mayi kuwayu* (see <http://aiatsis.gov.au/mayi-kuwayu>), and other academics on a pilot survey of the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the Murray region of New South Wales. This project, funded by Murray Local Land Services, is being conducted by researchers from the Australian National University, University of Canberra, University of Sydney and Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, in collaboration with Aboriginal communities in the Murray region of southern New South Wales. The first survey data were collected in 2016.

Chapter 1.2: Key points

- The topics included in the Regional Wellbeing Survey each year are selected based on consultation with a wide range of rural and regional organisations
- Some survey topics are asked every year, while others are included only occasionally
- Participants can complete the survey online or on paper
- Survey participants are recruited principally using flyers and paper surveys distributed to letter boxes, and emails to prior survey participants; in addition, many rural and regional organisations also promote the survey, and a survey prize draw is offered
- 13,303 people took part in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey, with the number of respondents growing by just over 1,000 compared to the 2014 survey, and by 4,000 compared to the 2013 survey
- Data presented in this report have, unless otherwise specified, been weighted to be representative of the rural and regional Australian population: this weighting addresses both deliberate over-sampling of farmers and people in some regions, as well as unintentional over-sampling of women and older people
- Confidence intervals are presented throughout the report to provide a guide to statistically significant differences between different groups of people, and people living in different regions
- Like any survey, the data presented in this report has limitations and caveats. Key amongst these are that some groups may be under-represented even after weighting of data, and missing data have not been imputed.

1.2 Methods

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the methods used to collect and produce data for the Regional Wellbeing Survey. Further description of data collection and analysis processes is provided in the Regional Wellbeing Survey User Guide, which can be downloaded at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

Designing survey questions

The Regional Wellbeing Survey includes a large number of questions. These are referred to from this point on as survey 'items', as not all are designed in the form of a question. The survey includes:

- Regular topics: These items are included every year and are asked of all respondents, enabling change to be tracked over time. The content of regular topics is reviewed annually to identify whether any change is needed to increase the utility of the content. Typically only limited changes are made each year, with a focus on ensuring continuity of data.
- Occasional topics: These items may be included in more than one survey, but usually only once every three to five years. This is done because we would not expect there to be significant change in a one –year period. These items are sometimes asked of all participants and sometimes of a subset of respondents called a 'panel'.

- ‘One-off’ topics: These items are included in the survey as a ‘one-off’ to enable exploration of a specific topic relevant to rural and regional wellbeing, but are not necessarily likely to be included again in future surveys. For example, in 2015 a set of items that examined the ways people spend time at waterways in NSW was included, but is not expected to be included again in future surveys. ‘One-off’ topics are sometimes asked of all respondents and sometimes of a panel of respondents.

This design means that each year the survey includes a number of pre-set items, but also has space to include additional content. In 2015, the survey topics were determined using a two-step process. First, survey partners and supporters were asked to complete a short survey which asked for their views on survey topics. Thirty one people, representing 35 organisations, completed the survey; a further eight contacted the research team directly to discuss specific topics of interest to them.

Suggestions were then collated and developed into a document that proposed topics for inclusion in the survey. Workshops were then held to prioritise which of the proposed topics would be included. Four workshops were held in August 2015 and were attended by over 30 representatives of survey supporters and partners. These included representatives from the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resources Economics and Sciences, Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, NSW Department of Primary Industries, Victorian Department of Economic Development Jobs Transport and Resources, the National Farmers’ Federation, Department of Social Services, Murray Darling Basin Authority, Department of the Environment, Office of Environment and Heritage NSW and the National Rural Health Alliance, amongst others. In these workshops, participants were asked to discuss the proposed topics and identify (i) whether each topic should be included in the survey (in the case of occasional or one-off topic proposals) and (ii) whether the proposed items required any changes (for all topics, including regular topics included each year).

This process enabled the selection of topics that were most relevant to a wide number of rural and regional organisations, who in turn represent the interests of a wide range of rural and regional Australians.

In addition to the items selected using the process described above, specific funding was provided by the following organisations to include questions on the topics of environmental watering, water reform, recreational time spent at waterways and farming-related topics¹: Murray-Darling Basin Authority; the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources; the Victorian Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources; and the Office of Environment and Heritage NSW. Once survey topics were decided, questions were designed and tested using the following process:

1. Survey items were drafted
2. Draft items were tested in focus groups and revised if necessary
3. The revised items were sent for review and comment to (i) survey partner and supporting organisations and (ii) researchers with expertise relevant to the topic. The survey was then further revised based on feedback received.

¹ Results for the survey items funded by these organisations are published and made publicly available in the same way results are published for all parts of the Regional Wellbeing Survey.

4. The penultimate survey items were professionally formatted and pilot tested with a sample of 60 people. The test results were examined and a final revision of questions undertaken.

Table 1.2a summarises the topics included in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey. It indicates whether each topic was asked of all participants, or of a randomly selected subset of participants. Table 1.2b shows topics asked of farmers only, the results of which will be reported in forthcoming reports.

Collecting survey data

The Regional Wellbeing Survey is open to adult residents of rural and regional Australia. Rural and regional Australia is defined as all areas of Australia outside the capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra, although a small comparison sample was also collected from these large urban areas. The cities of Hobart and Darwin are included as part of the Regional Wellbeing Survey due to their smaller population sizes.

In 2015, participants could complete the survey between October 12th and December 1st. In southern Tasmania an additional round of survey participation was held from January 16th to February 6th 2016 to increase response rates, and a separate small prize draw was offered in this region. Participants could request support when completing the survey by calling a free telephone number at any time; more than 1,000 calls were received on this number during the survey period. Two *platforms* were used to collect data, and participants were *recruited* using a wide variety of methods, described in the next sections.

Survey platforms

A survey 'platform' refers to the mechanism by which people take part in a survey. Common platforms include paper surveys, online surveys, and phone surveys. The 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey could be completed using either of two platforms, with participants able to select the platform they preferred to use:

- *Online survey:* The survey could be completed online at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au. The online survey was designed so that the participant, as long as they had enabled cookies on their computer, did not have to complete the survey in one sitting. Those who experienced internet drop-out or did not have time to complete the survey in a single session could return to the website, which would then automatically resume the survey at the point they had previously reached. A total of 9,949 people chose to complete the survey online
- *Paper survey:* People who had heard about the survey through one of the recruitment methods described below, but who could not (or preferred not to) complete it online, were able to request a paper survey be mailed to them by calling a free telephone number prominently displayed on all survey recruitment materials. Additionally, paper surveys were mailed directly to a large number of farmers. Paper survey recipients were sent a survey pack that included the survey form, an information sheet and a prepaid envelope to return the completed survey. A total of 3,354 people completed the paper version of the survey.

Table 1.2a Topics included in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey – asked of all types of respondents

Survey topic	What type of topic was this?		Where can I access results for this topic?
	Regular topic (Asked each year)	Occasional topic	
Community wellbeing	✓		Report 1: People & communities
<i>Views about liveability, landscape, economy, local organisations, local government, crime, safety in local community</i>			Report 1: People & communities
Access to services and infrastructure	✓		Report 1: People & communities
<i>Views about access to health, education, childcare, roads, housing, professional services, retail shops and others</i>			Report 1: People & communities
Belonging and exclusion	✓		Report 1: People & communities
<i>Whether people feel a sense of belonging or exclusion, or feel other people are excluded, in their community</i>			Report 1 (limited), Forthcoming reports
Environmental health	✓		Forthcoming reports
<i>Views about health of the environment in the local region</i>			Forthcoming reports
Drought and extreme weather events	✓ (some items)	✓ (some items)	Forthcoming reports
<i>Experience of extreme weather events, and specific questions examining experience and effects of drought</i>			Forthcoming reports
Migration and residence	✓		Report 1: People & communities
<i>How long people had lived in their current community, and whether they intended to shift</i>			Report 1: People & communities
Participation in social and civic activities	✓		Report 1: People & communities
<i>How often people participate in different activities such as sports groups, community events and volunteering</i>			Report 1: People & communities
Skills and education	✓		Report 1: People & communities
<i>Views about a person's confidence in their skills and access to resources</i>			Report 1: People & communities
Individual wellbeing	✓		Report 1: People & communities
<i>Participants were asked to rate their wellbeing using a series of standard questions on subjective wellbeing</i>			Report 1: People & communities
Health & health relevant behaviours	✓		Report 1: People & communities
<i>Participants were asked about their general health, psychological distress, physical health, and smoking and drinking behaviours</i>			Report 1: People & communities
Socio-demographic characteristics	✓		Used in all reports
<i>Age, gender, cultural background, household structure, educational attainment, household income and occupation</i>			Used in all reports
Recreational use of waterways in NSW		✓	Forthcoming reports
<i>NSW participants only. Recreational activities in and around freshwater waterways and health of waterways</i>			Forthcoming reports
Environmental watering		✓	Forthcoming reports
<i>Views about environmental watering, and observed outcomes of environmental watering events</i>			Forthcoming reports
Murray-Darling Basin Plan	✓		Forthcoming reports
<i>Participants were asked their views about the impacts of the Plan</i>			Forthcoming reports
Acceptability of land use change		✓	Forthcoming reports
<i>Participants were asked how acceptable they find a number of land and water use changes that are occurring in parts of rural and regional Australia</i>			Forthcoming reports
Climate change	✓		Forthcoming reports
<i>Participants were asked their views about climate change</i>			Forthcoming reports

Table 1.2b Topics included in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey – asked of farmers only, with results to be reported in our ‘Farming and agriculture’ report

Survey topic	What type of topic is this?		Where can I access results for this topic?
	Regular topic (Asked each year of all farmers)	Occasional topic	
Farmer and farm enterprise characteristics <i>Type of farm (e.g. commodities produced), area and business structure</i>	✓		Forthcoming reports
Irrigation and water trading (asked of irrigators only) <i>Type of irrigation system used, volume of water entitlements and allocation, and engagement in water trading activity in last 12 months</i>	✓ (some items)	✓ (some items)	Forthcoming reports
Agricultural grants and support <i>Use and usefulness of different types of grants and support accessed by farmers</i>	✓		Forthcoming reports
Farm planning, management and consultation <i>Farmers were asked about the types of farm planning they do, and about the people and organisations they consult with regarding their farm management</i>	✓ (some items)	✓ (some items)	Forthcoming reports
Farm finances and on- and off-farm income <i>Farmers were asked about their farm financial health, and on- and off-farm income earning</i>		✓	Forthcoming reports
Farm enterprise change <i>Farmers were asked whether they had changed the size, type or employment structure of their farm enterprise in the last 12 months</i>	✓		Forthcoming reports
Future farming intentions <i>Farmers were asked how likely they were to change the size, type of employment structure of their farm enterprise in the next 5 years</i>	✓		Forthcoming reports
Natural resource management and regenerative farming <i>Farmers were asked if they undertake any of a number of NRM activities or manage their farm using regenerative farming principles</i>	✓		Forthcoming reports
Barriers to farm development <i>Extent to which different issues present barriers to farm development</i>	✓		Forthcoming reports

The Regional Wellbeing Survey primarily uses an online platform for a number of reasons. The most important is that online platforms offer greater flexibility in survey design compared to other platforms, and enable a larger range of items to be included in the survey.. The cost of collecting data via an online platform is also substantially lower than for other platforms, and online surveys can be designed to minimise data entry error. However, online surveys also have disadvantages: the most commonly cited disadvantage is that they can result in a biased sample. This is addressed in the Regional Wellbeing Survey by (i) offering a paper survey option to ensure those who are unable or unwilling to complete the survey online are able to participate, and (ii) using recruitment methods (described below) that reduce the likelihood of bias by ensuring the survey is promoted to a random sample of households.

A paper survey option will continue to be offered for the foreseeable future. This is because, despite high rates of internet usage in rural and regional Australia, a substantial minority of participants report problems successfully accessing the online survey, largely due to lack of reliable access to high speed internet at their residence.

The use of an online survey platform enabled us to offer participants two options of survey length, something which can encourage participation by those who do not have time to complete a long survey. Online survey participants were asked if they would prefer to complete a short or regular-length version of the survey. The short survey included only regular topics (shown in Tables 1.2a and 1.2b) and no occasional or one-off topics. It took around 20 minutes for non-farmers to complete and 30 minutes for farmers (as farmers were asked specific questions about their farm, survey completion time was typically longer for farmers). For non-farmers, the regular length survey included all topics shown in Tables 1.2a, and took approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete. For farmers, the regular length survey included almost all topics in Table 1.2a, with some occasional and one-off topics being randomised between three groups of farmers. The regular survey took 40 to 60 minutes for most farmers to complete depending on how many questions were applicable to the respondent.

Online participants were advised how long each version of the survey would take and informed that they would receive four entries into the prize draw if they chose to complete the regular survey, and one entry if they chose to complete the short survey. Of the 9,949 participants who completed the survey online, 13.2% chose the short survey and 86.8% chose the regular survey.

Paper surveys were designed to be the same length as the 'regular length' online survey. There were four versions of the paper survey: non-farmers completed a version which included all topics other than those specifically for farmers. Farmers completed one of three 'farmer surveys', each of which included all regular questions as well as one-third of the occasional and one-off topics. Of the 3,354 participants who completed the survey using a paper form, 84.8% were farmers and 15.2% were non-farmers.

Survey recruitment

A wide variety of methods can be used to encourage, or 'recruit', people to take part in a survey. When selecting recruitment methods, the objective is to achieve as representative a sample as possible, meaning that the recruitment should encourage all types of people relevant to the study to take part – in this case, all adult rural and regional Australians. While all (or almost all) surveys

achieve a biased sample of respondents, using appropriate recruitment methods can reduce this bias, and as a result reduces the complexity of addressing biases when analysing data. The multiple recruitment methods used in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey were designed to complement each other, and are summarised in Table 1.2c. To enable us to assess the utility of different recruitment methods, all survey participants were asked to indicate how they heard about the survey. This helps us to identify which types of people are more or less likely to be recruited into the survey using different methods.

Recruitment methods used in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey were:

- **Flyers and printed surveys delivered to letterboxes.**
 - This was the principal means of recruitment: 83.6% of participants reported hearing about the survey via a flyer or survey pack delivered to their letterbox. Participants were selected to receive flyers and printed surveys in the following ways, which were designed to achieve desired sample sizes in different regions and of different types of people, while simultaneously ensuring a random sample was selected *within* each of these regions and groups:
 - In intensively sampled regions, flyers were delivered to every letterbox in designated postal areas. This occurred only in areas in which funding was received to intensively sample the local region. A list of these regions is provided in the Regional Wellbeing Survey Data User Guide, available at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au
 - In non-intensively sampled regions, flyers were sent to addresses selected at random from the publicly available mailing database 'Aus-On-Disc'. This resulted in a smaller proportion of households being requested to participate in the survey compared to the intensively sampled regions, but ensured a random sample was selected.
 - To ensure a large sample of farmers was achieved, farmers were deliberately over-sampled. This was done through identifying a random sample of farmers using the FarmBase database. As with the broader sample, specific funding was contributed to increase the sample of farmers living in some regions. To achieve this, a greater proportion of farmers were selected to receive paper surveys in regions for which additional funding was received, while in all other regions, a simple random sample was used.
- **Email promotion.**
 - Previous Regional Wellbeing Survey participants who had given permission to be contacted about the survey again were emailed an invitation to participate in the survey. In addition, rural and regional organisations throughout Australia were asked to promote the survey to their online networks by forwarding an email encouraging participation in the survey. Around 95 organisations are known to have forwarded this email. It is likely that other organisations also promoted the survey to their networks via email but did not notify the RWS team they had done so. In total, 31.8% of participants indicated they heard about the survey via email. Many of these indicated they heard about the survey via both a flyer/survey pack *and* email.

- **Newsletter, social media and traditional media promotion.**
 - Some organisations chose to post a notice about the survey on their social media sites (Facebook, Twitter), an online version of the flyer on the homepage of their website, or included an item in their newsletter. In addition, several media outlets promoted the survey via interviews with the researchers. In total, 5.2% of participants indicated that they had heard about the survey via social media, traditional media or a newsletter.

Table 1.2c Methods used to recruit participants in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey, in descending order of importance

Recruitment method	Description	Regions targeted
Flyer promotion	<p>Flyers were delivered by Australia Post to a total of just over 591,000 delivery points. While flyers have a low response rate (approx. one in 60 achieves a survey response), they are cost-effective as a recruitment measure due to the very low cost of delivering flyers compared to posting letters or survey forms.</p>	<p>The majority of flyer distribution was determined by funding received. This reflects the funding model for the survey: currently, funding is determined year to year, and in most cases funders providing funding to cover specific regions, rather than the nation as a whole. Of the total number of flyers, 47% were delivered in Victoria, 36% in New South Wales, 6% in South Australia, 3% to Tasmania, 7% to Queensland, and the remaining 1% in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.</p>
Mailed survey	<p>Mailed surveys were sent to a pre-determined sample of farmers across Australia (most would have also received a flyer prior to receiving the letter). The purpose was to increase the number of responses from farmers, who often prefer to complete surveys on paper rather than online. A sample of farmers was purchased from the FarmBase database. Each farmer was sent a survey pack containing the questionnaire, a letter encouraging completion, an information sheet, flyer, and a pre-paid return envelope. Farmers who participated in previous waves of the Regional Wellbeing Survey, who gave permission to be contacted again and indicated a preference for mail rather than email, were also sent a survey pack (a total of 819 farmers).</p>	<p>Survey packs were sent to farmers in regions where funding was received for the survey. A total of 30,500 survey packs were posted to farmers, with 12,500 posted to farmers in Victoria, 9,500 to farmers in New South Wales, 4,000 in Queensland, 2,500 in South Australia, 1,000 in Tasmania and 1000 in Western Australia.</p>
Email, newsletter and social media promotion	<p>People who had participated in the 2013 and 2014 survey, and had given permission to be contacted about future surveys, were emailed and invited to participate in the survey again. Rural and regional organisations were asked to forward an email encouraging participation in the survey, and to include an invitation to in their newsletters or on social media. A large number of organisations assisted with this, reaching thousands of people across rural and regional Australia.</p>	All
Prize draw	<p>Survey participants had the option of entering a draw to win one of nine prizes. Winners could choose a Coles-Myer, WISH, IGA or Flight Centre gift card. Online participants who chose to complete the regular length survey received four entries into the prize draw, those who completed the paper survey received four entries, and those who chose the shortest version of the survey received one entry into the prize draw. In total, 10,610 participants elected to take part in the prize draw.</p>	All

Survey responses

A total of 13,303 people took part in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey. This was an increase of just over 1,100 compared to the 2014 survey (completed by 12,125 people), and of more than 4,000 since the 2013 survey (completed by 9,135 people).

The number of responses from Tasmania and South Australia remained relatively stable between 2014 and 2015: responses from Tasmania fell slightly from 564 to 529 participants, and in South Australia from 1,224 respondents in 2014 to 1,191 in 2015. The number of participants grew in (i) New South Wales (from 3,403 in 2014 to 3,989 in 2015), (ii) Queensland (from 728 to 1083) and (iii) Victoria (from 5289 to 5411). Participation fell in Western Australia, from 791 to 531, reflecting the relatively lower levels of funding available to include Western Australians in the survey compared to other states.

Figure 1.2a shows the number of survey responses received from different Regional Development Australia (RDA) regions across Australia. Broadly speaking, responses are higher in areas with larger population sizes, namely regions in south-eastern Australia. Beyond this expected distribution of responses, the majority of responses were received from regions in which funding was available to mail flyers and/or questionnaire packs directly to residents. Fewer responses were received in regions where email, newsletter and social media promotion was the principal recruitment method. In cases where less than 100 responses were received from a RDA region, that region was grouped with a neighbouring RDA when reporting results. In three cases, too few responses were received to report the region at all. The Northern Territory, Pilbara and Kimberley all had very low responses and results for these regions are not being reported in the 2015 survey as a result. We are identifying opportunities to increase sample sizes in these regions to improve the regional coverage of the RWS.

Representativeness of responses

As the RWS uses non-traditional survey recruitment methods, it is not possible to estimate the number of people who received a request asking them to consider taking part in the survey, and hence it is not possible to accurately estimate a survey response rate. As noted in previous RWS reports, response rates are a relatively poor indication of the quality or representativeness of survey responses (Johnson and Wislar, 2012). Instead, each year we analyse representativeness by comparing the characteristics of survey respondents to those of people living in rural and regional Australia. This analysis considers both the groups and regions that are deliberately oversampled in the survey: for example, farmers are deliberately oversampled each year to enable this group to be analysed in-depth. Additionally, in 2015 specific funding was provided to increase the number of people surveyed in Victoria. As expected, this resulted in over-representation of farmers and Victorians in the responses (Table 1.2d). There was also a bias towards older and female respondents.



Figure 1.2a Number of survey responses received, by Regional Development Australia region

Table 1.2d Comparison of Regional Wellbeing Survey respondents to characteristics of rural and regional Australians

Characteristic		Rural and regional Australia, 2011 ¹	Regional Wellbeing Survey, 2014	Regional Wellbeing Survey, 2015
State	NSW & ACT	33.7%	28.4%	31.3%
	Vic	18.4%	43.7%	42.3%
	Qld	27.5%	6.0%	8.5%
	SA	5.5%	10.1%	9.3%
	WA & NT	9.2%	7.0%	4.5%
	Tas	5.6%	4.7%	4.1%
Gender	Female	50.3%	57.9%	57.7%
	Male	49.7%	42.1%	42.2%
Age	18-39	34.4%	13.7%	12.7%
	40-54	27.9%	29.8%	27.0%
	55-64	17.0%	28.6%	29.3%
	65+	20.8%	27.9%	31.0%
Working as a farmer	Farmer	3.8%	30.6%	35.5%
	Non-farmer	96.2%	69.4%	64.5%

¹Data source: Australian Bureau of Statistics *Census of Population and Housing 2011*. Data accessed via TableBuilderPro. Data were calculated for rural and regional Australia and exclude people living in the cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra.

In addition to analysing the sample for representativeness of socio-demographic characteristics of the population, it is helpful to identify whether there was bias in terms of the focus area of the survey – wellbeing. To examine this, each year we compare people who were recruited into the survey using different methods, to identify whether some recruitment methods achieve a sample of people with markedly different levels of wellbeing when compared to other recruitment methods. Figure 1.2b compares people who were recruited to participate in the survey by (i) flyer, and (ii) email, based on their mean ‘global life satisfaction’ (GLS) score. The GLS is a commonly used measure of wellbeing, described in detail in Chapter 2. Flyers and emails are the two most common methods of recruitment to the survey, and provide a useful comparison. Both groups show a very similar GLS profile, suggesting limited if any difference in the wellbeing of people recruited using these two methods.

While the biases identified in this section are expected, they need to be addressed when analysing data. The methods used to do this are described in the next section.

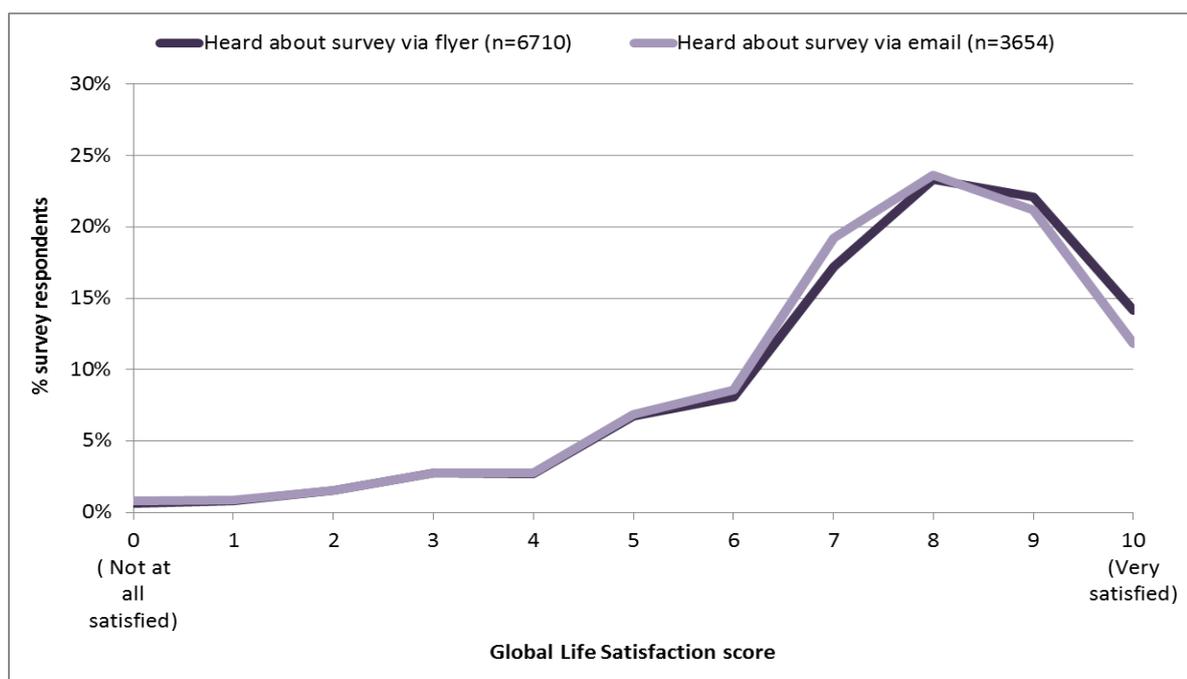


Figure 1.2b Comparison of Global Life Satisfaction scores reported by survey participants recruited principally by (i) flyer and (ii) email

Data preparation & analysis

The data presented in this report were prepared and analysed in multiple stages from data cleaning, coding and preparation to analysis, weighting and the calculation of confidence intervals.

Data preparation

Prior to data analysis, Regional Wellbeing Survey data were processed and cleaned. This involved:

- Entering data from paper surveys into the online survey form, and checking data for errors
- Formatting survey data (both online and paper), with responses to each survey item checked for consistency, coded numerically where appropriate, and any missing data identified
- Removal of invalid surveys. All surveys in which a participant had completed fewer than 10 items were removed. Duplicate surveys (for example, in which a participant began the survey more than once) were also removed, as were any responses in which participants had deliberately completed the survey multiple times (only two instances were identified of the latter after a comprehensive check of the dataset).

Data analysis

The cleaned data set was then analysed. Analysis of data for this report was undertaken using Microsoft Excel, SPSS, R, SAS and Stata.

Calculation of averages

'Average' scores are reported for many results in this report. Unless otherwise specified, the term 'average' refers to the mean score for the group of people being analysed (not to the median or mode).

Data weighting

A key part of the analysis was the weighting of data where appropriate. ‘Weighting’ refers to a statistical process in which known biases in the responses received are corrected for. Weighting was used to correct for both intentional over-sampling (of farmers and some regions), and non-intentional biases (the bias towards female and older respondents). The weighting of responses involves adjusting the relative contribution each survey respondent makes to the whole when analysing survey results, so analysis of the sample more accurately represents the population from which it was drawn (in this case, people living in rural and regional Australia). Weighting doesn’t change the answers people gave to survey items.

Data were weighted using GREGWT, a generalised regression weighting procedure developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Bell, 2000). GREGWT is a SAS macro that generates survey weights so that survey estimates agree with external benchmarks, which were obtained from the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *Census of Population and Housing*. For the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey, the benchmarks used were age (18-39, 40-54, 55-64, 65+), gender (female, male), agricultural occupation (farmer, not-farmer), and geographical location (21 geographic regions were defined across Australia in which sampling intensity varied, and each included as a benchmark, enabling different sampling intensities to be corrected as part of the weighting process). In a small number of more urbanised regions, the agricultural occupation criteria were not used due to the very low numbers of farmers living in the region. Weighting has been applied to all analyses in this report, unless otherwise specified.

Due to the way GREGWT calculates weights, a small number of respondents were allocated unrealistically high weights. This was a consequence of having a small number of observations corresponding to a particular benchmark category (Central Statistics Office 2001). To control for extreme weights, weights were Winsorised at the 95th percentile, thus limiting the effect of unrealistically high weights. Winsorisation was considered an appropriate method of adjusting the data as (i) the source of data bias was known, and (ii) comparison of Winsorised and non-Winsorised datasets against independent benchmarks for key variables showed that the Winsorised data better reflects distributions seen in other datasets. Independent benchmarks were taken in all cases from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 *Census of Population and Housing*.

Confidence intervals

Throughout this report, 95% confidence intervals are shown as part of the results. A confidence interval, put simply, is a measure of how confident we can be in the results. More accurately, it tells you the boundaries between which, statistically, the mean value of a given variable would be 95% likely to fall if the survey was repeated multiple times with a similar sample. In general, confidence is higher if there is a large sample size and little deviation in responses (for example, almost all people answered ‘4’ on a scale of 1 to 7). Confidence is lower if there is a small sample size and high deviation (for example, equal numbers of people answered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 on the 7-point scale). Figure 1.2c provides an example to assist in interpreting confidence intervals.

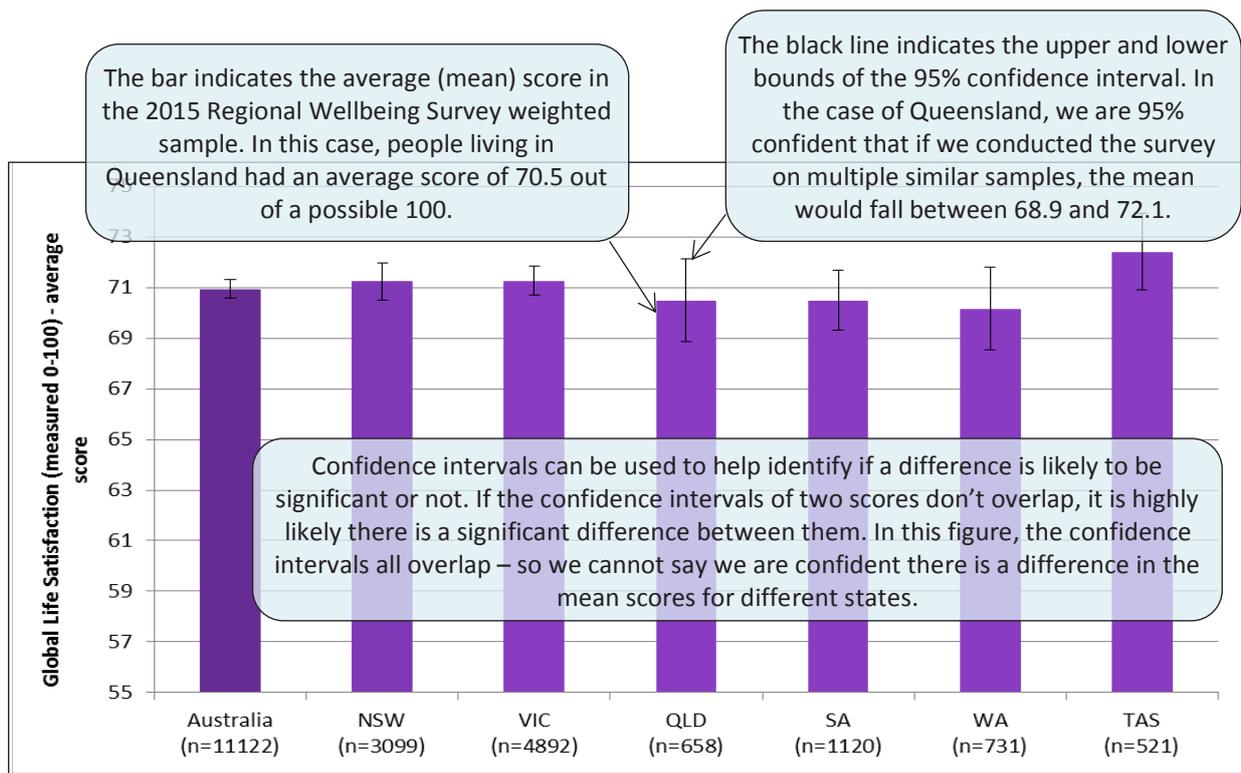


Figure 1.2c Interpreting confidence intervals

Confidence intervals were calculated using the following formulae:

Mean scores: 95% confidence intervals were calculated using the classic formula. Using this formula, there is 95% confidence that, if multiple similar samples were taken, the true value of the mean would fall between $\pm 1.96 \times \frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}$ where σ is the standard deviation, and $\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}$ is the standard error of the mean.

Proportions: In some cases, we report results by proportions – for example, we might report that 40% of people had a low level of wellbeing, and 20% a high level of wellbeing. A different approach is needed to calculate the confidence interval for a proportion, as it isn't possible to use the standard error of the mean in this case. There is debate in the literature about the most appropriate calculation for proportions and related quantities. The classically used 'Exact' confidence interval for proportions is widely agreed to be too conservative, while the alternative approach - the Wald interval - is considered not conservative enough. We therefore used the modified Wald confidence interval proposed by Agresti and Coull (1998), which has been shown to be appropriate for large sample sizes such as that available in the Regional Wellbeing Survey (Brown et al. 2001). Using the modified Wald, we are 95% confident the true value of the proportion being reported falls

between $p' \pm 2 \sqrt{\frac{p'(1-p')}{n+4}}$ where $p' \approx \frac{Pn+2}{n+4}$; P is the proportion (e.g. 20% of people responded 'yes') and n the sample size for the variable. Note that while this type of confidence interval is often graphed around p' , rather than p , for simplicity and ease of interpretation we present it as an interval around the percentage being reported.

While confidence intervals provide a useful way of understanding how reliable the results are likely to be, they are not perfect. Confidence interval calculations assume that data are normally distributed, and a representative sample has been achieved. If these conditions are not met, the confidence interval may not be an accurate representation of confidence. In this report, the weighting of data can amplify unknown biases in the dataset, reducing confidence intervals. The potential for this has been reduced through the use of Windsorising when weighting, described earlier. Because of these limitations, confidence intervals are a useful indicator of confidence in the results, but will not be completely accurate in representing confidence in all cases.

Comparing data over time

This report principally presents data from the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey. Some cross-sectional comparisons are made to 2013 and 2014 survey data where appropriate. Cross-sectional means that the average scores are compared across time, but the respondents who participated differ in each year: in other words, a cross-sectional analysis does not track the views of the same group of respondents over time, but has a new sample of people in each wave of data. The report does not include longitudinal analysis that is based on tracking the same people over time. Longitudinal analysis will begin in future years when enough people have completed the survey across multiple years to enable meaningful longitudinal analysis of how a specific set of people have changed over time.

Strengths and weaknesses

A key strength of the Regional Wellbeing Survey is that the large sample enables us to weight data so we can make statements about the population as a whole. However, all research has limitations and the Regional Wellbeing Survey is no exception. The following important limitations should be noted when reading this report and drawing conclusions from it.

‘Significant’ differences are not always meaningful

Throughout this report, confidence intervals are used to identify whether there is likely to be a significant difference between groups. Significance is a statistical term, and in this case significance is assessed using a confidence interval. It is not a test of meaningfulness. The meaningfulness of differences between regions, or different groups of people, can be judged subjectively (through people discussing what they believe to be a meaningful difference), or objectively (for example, by statistically analysing what size difference between groups needs to be present before some other relevant variable changes in a measurable way).

Technical limitations: missing data, sample error

Not all respondents answered every question they were asked. Missing data imputation can be used to estimate what respondents might have said if they had answered every question they were asked to answer, but in the initial analysis of results presented in this report no imputation has been undertaken, with the exception of some summary measures in which the mean score for all other variables included in a scale was imputed for a small number of missing variables. This means that results may differ compared to any future analyses of the survey data that do impute missing data. Though we have weighted the data for biases resulting from sampling strategy and sampling error, we will not have removed all sample-related error.

Some groups are not well represented in the Regional Wellbeing Survey

The Regional Wellbeing Survey is easier to complete for people with good literacy skills and for those with internet access. It is less easy to complete for those with poor English literacy or poor access to the internet. Our long-term goal is to provide versions of the survey that can be more readily completed by people for whom English is a second language or who have difficulties with reading, writing or using a computer. However, the funding available for the 2015 survey did not permit investment in these areas. This means that people with poor literacy in general, and those for whom English literacy is low in particular, are expected to be significantly under-represented in the survey results. In total, the 2015 survey included 372 respondents who reported they were born in a non-English speaking country.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are also under-represented in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey. A total of 152 people who participated in the survey identified as having these origins, representing just over 1% of survey respondents, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3% of the Australia population (ABS 2013). As mentioned earlier in this report, the Regional Wellbeing Survey team have been working with researchers who are establishing a new national survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing, *Mayi kuwayu*. This means that, in future years, comprehensive analysis of the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders will be possible via the data generated in the *Mayi kuwayu* survey.

The results are a snapshot in time, influenced by the issues of the day

The data collected in the Regional Wellbeing Survey represents the views of rural and regional Australians during the period in which data were collected. Each year the data are collected during spring, during an eight week period in October and November. The views expressed by survey participants will have been influenced by specific issues occurring during that period.

Ethics

The Regional Wellbeing Survey was approved by the University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee, protocol number 12-186.

Chapter 1.3: Key points

- In this report, we show results of the survey for people living in different states and Regional Development Australia regions
- More detailed data can be downloaded from www.regionalwellbeing.org.au in the form of data tables showing results for the following geographic regions: (i) local government areas (where adequate responses were received), (ii) Regional Development Australia regions, and (iii) natural resource management regions.

1.3. Survey regions

A large number of organisations use data from the Regional Wellbeing Survey. Some are most interested in seeing findings for particular local government areas, others for specific catchments or natural resource management regions, and others prefer to see data reported for more specific geographic regions. To help meet these different needs, data tables from the RWS are produced for a number of different geographic classifications. While the results presented in this report focus on states and Regional Development Australia regions, data are also available for other regions, and can be downloaded at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au. Data are produced for the following regions:

States: We report results for rural and regional areas of New South Wales (NSW), Victoria (Vic), Queensland (Qld), South Australia (SA), Tasmania (Tas) and Western Australia (WA). In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Northern Territory (NT) too few rural residents took part to enable separate reporting for these regions. Instead, the results of rural residents in the ACT who took part in the survey are included and reported as part of the Southern Inland and rural ACT region. In 2015, views of NT residents are not reported due to small numbers of responses; similarly, too few responses were received from north-west regions of WA to enable reporting for these specific regions. A key objective in future waves is to increase response rates in north-west WA and the NT to enable reporting of results for these regions.

Regional Development Authorities: Results are reported for different Regional Development Australia (RDA) regions. These are large regions, each of which includes several local government areas. Where possible, results are reported by individual RDA region. However, in several cases not enough responses were received from an RDA to report results separately. In these cases, two or more RDAs have been combined to form an 'RDA region', for which results are reported. Data for RDA regions is presented in several parts of this report, and is also available to download at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

Natural resource management regions: Data for different natural resource management (NRM) regions in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, and for Local Land Services (LLS) regions in New South Wales, can be downloaded from www.regionalwellbeing.org.au. In a small number of cases, too few responses were received from an NRM region to report the results; in these cases, results are reported for two or more contiguous NRM regions as a single group.

Local government areas: Local government areas (LGAs) are the smallest scale at which data from the survey are released publicly. Where possible, survey results are produced for a single LGA, or for a small group of neighbouring LGAs. This is only possible where 100 or more responses are received for an LGA or group of LGAs. Results for these regions can be downloaded from www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

Section 2: Wellbeing

This section of the report examines the wellbeing of people and communities in rural and regional Australia in 2015. It examines overall wellbeing 'outcomes' – meaning the characteristics you would expect a person or community to have if the many things that influence wellbeing have come together to provide a high quality of life. For example, a person with higher levels of wellbeing will be more satisfied with their life compared to someone with poorer wellbeing. A community with higher wellbeing will be more likely to be rated as highly liveable by its residents. We consider both the wellbeing of individual people and the wellbeing of communities more broadly. It is important to recognise that the wellbeing of a community is not simply the sum of the wellbeing of the people living in it: for example, in some cases a community in which most people have high wellbeing will not benefit from that wellbeing, as its residents may choose to shift to new places in times of difficulty rather than staying and contributing to the community. In others, people will contribute their skills and resources to helping build the future of the community they live in. Given this, it is important to examine the wellbeing of people and of communities, as well as the relationship between them.

While this section focuses on wellbeing outcomes, the following section examines some of the many factors that may be influencing these outcomes – sometimes called wellbeing determinants. These are the things that contribute to wellbeing, such as a person's mental and physical health, standard of living, confidence in their skills and education, social connectedness, and the liveability of their community.

Chapter 2.1: Key points

- This chapter examines the wellbeing of people, which is defined as a state in which a person is able to realise their own potential and contribute to their community
- Three indicators were used to examine the wellbeing of people: Global Life Satisfaction, the Personal Wellbeing Index and Worthwhileness
- Most rural and regional Australians report feeling satisfied with their lives, with 70% feeling highly satisfied with their life
- Even more (79%) reported they felt the things they did in life were worthwhile
- In 2015, rural and regional Australians were most commonly satisfied with how safe they felt, their standard of living and their personal relationships; they reported lowest satisfaction on average with their health, future security and what they were currently achieving in life
- There was little difference in wellbeing of people living in different states, although Tasmanians reported slightly poorer wellbeing on some measures compared to those living elsewhere
- The average Global Life Satisfaction and Personal Wellbeing Index scores across rural and regional Australia, and for individual states, did not change significantly between 2014 and 2015; in a small number of regions there were significant changes, including a decline in wellbeing in the Mid West Gascoyne & Goldfields Esperance region of WA
- Women, those aged 65 and older, and farmers (both dryland and irrigating) were more likely to report high levels of wellbeing compared to the national average, and those who were not in employment and those aged 30 to 49 were less likely to.

2.1 Wellbeing of people

This chapter examines the wellbeing of individual people living in rural and regional Australia. Wellbeing at the scale of the individual person is defined as:

a state ... in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. (World Health Organization, 2013)

Many factors contribute to a person's overall wellbeing, including their safety and security, their physical and mental health, their relationships and social networks, their access to goods and services, and the fairness of the society they live in (see Wilkinson and Marmot 2003 for more examples). These factors are examined in more detail in Section 3.

When considering wellbeing, it is important to identify both those people experiencing 'positive' wellbeing – in other words, those people with high levels of wellbeing – and those who are experiencing poor wellbeing, sometimes called 'illbeing'. This section focuses on wellbeing (whether rural and regional Australians are feeling positive about their lives), rather than on illbeing. Experiences of 'illbeing' are discussed further in Section 3, which examines a measure of psychological distress.

What did we measure and why?

The 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey measured a person's overall wellbeing using three key measures, each of which could shed light on different aspects of wellbeing (Ryan et al. 2001). Two of the measures were 'hedonic', meaning they examine how pleasurable life is for a person (in the form of feeling satisfied or happy); and the third was 'eudaimonic' (from the Greek '*eudamonia*', which focused on the idea that happiness was the consequence of a virtuous life). Eudaimonic measures examine the extent to which a person feels a sense of meaningfulness or worthwhileness in their life. The three measures were:

1. **Global Life Satisfaction (GLS):** Global life satisfaction is measured using a single item that asks respondents to indicate how satisfied they are with their 'life as a whole'. Responses are recorded on a scale ranging from 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (very satisfied). In this hedonic measure of wellbeing, the person answering the question is not asked to identify which aspects of their life they are more or less satisfied with, but instead to give an overall rating of satisfaction. The 11 point scale is generally accepted as user-friendly in self-completion surveys while consistently proving to be of higher sensitivity to a person's discriminative capacity and when compared to five or seven point scales (Cummins, 2003). In reporting this measure, scores are multiplied by 10 to adjust the scale to a measure from 0 to 100. The GLS item is widely used in wellbeing surveys in Australia and internationally.
2. **Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI):** The PWI was developed in Australia by researchers based at the Australian Centre on Quality of Life, and further information about its extensive use both in Australia and internationally can be found at <http://www.acqol.com.au/iwbg/wellbeing-index/>. This index also uses a hedonic approach to measuring wellbeing, but instead of asking respondents to rate their overall level of satisfaction, they are asked how satisfied they are with the following aspects of their life: (i) your standard of living, (ii) your health, (iii) what you are currently achieving in life, (iv) your personal relationships, (v) how safe you feel, (vi) feeling part of your community, and (vii) your future security. Extreme values (where a respondent indicated a score of 0 or 10 for all of the seven items) are removed from the sample and a mean score is then calculated. This produces a measure which ranges from 1 to 99 (International Wellbeing Group, 2013).
3. **Feeling life is worthwhile (Worthwhileness):** This is a eudaimonic measure of wellbeing, which examines how meaningful a person is finding their life. This measure is different to satisfaction, as it is possible for a person to feel dissatisfied but also that they are achieving meaningful things. The measure is based on a person's rating on a scale of 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely worthwhile) when asked 'Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?' This question has been less widely used internationally than the GLS or PWI, but when tested by the Office of National Statistics in the United Kingdom, was found to provide information on wellbeing that differed to other measures of individual wellbeing (OECD, 2013).

Findings for each of the three measures are reported in this chapter. Overall, all three show relatively similar patterns, but each can also shed light on which aspects of life are going well and poorly for different rural and regional Australians.

Wellbeing of rural and regional Australians: comparing the three measures

Overall, in 2015, most rural and regional Australians reported high levels of wellbeing: 70% reported good to very good levels of life satisfaction using both the GLS and PWI measures, and 79% agreed that the things they were doing in their life were worthwhile (Figure 2.1a). However, 30% reported low levels of life satisfaction, and 21% did not feel the things they were doing in life were worthwhile. It is important to understand which people are experiencing low levels of wellbeing, and subsequent parts of this chapter examine this in more detail.



Figure 2.1a Wellbeing of rural and regional Australians in 2015 – comparison of three measures

When examined over time, there was relatively little change in either the PWI or GLS measures of wellbeing (Figure 2.1b). This is an expected finding: wellbeing levels typically remain very stable across entire populations over time unless a major event occurs which substantially changes the wellbeing of a large proportion of the population in a short period of time. For example, in the 2015 World Happiness Report the country of Greece was identified as having a decline in overall wellbeing at population level following substantial and prolonged economic recession (Helliwell et al. 2015). In the absence of major systemic change that affects the wellbeing of many people, wellbeing levels typically remain highly stable. Work by prominent wellbeing researchers has consistently demonstrated that at a population level, wellbeing scores measured out of 100 typically vary by less than two to three points on a year to year basis. This has been shown by the ongoing work of the Australian Centre for Quality of Life, which has found that in Australia wellbeing typically remains stable except in cases where major life changing events occur (see for example Anglim et al. 2015). Although it is not expected that wellbeing levels will vary significantly for people living across rural and regional Australia, what will vary is the wellbeing of specific groups who may be experiencing particularly difficult or prosperous times.

While people’s own ratings of their overall satisfaction with life (the GLS measure) remained very stable, the PWI did change slightly: fewer people had a poor wellbeing score in 2015, and more had a high score, compared to 2014. This suggests that it is possible one or more of the different wellbeing dimensions measured in the PWI (for example, security, safety, connection to community, health, or standard of living) changed for the better for some rural and regional Australians, even though overall life satisfaction ratings from 2015 were relatively similar to those from 2014.

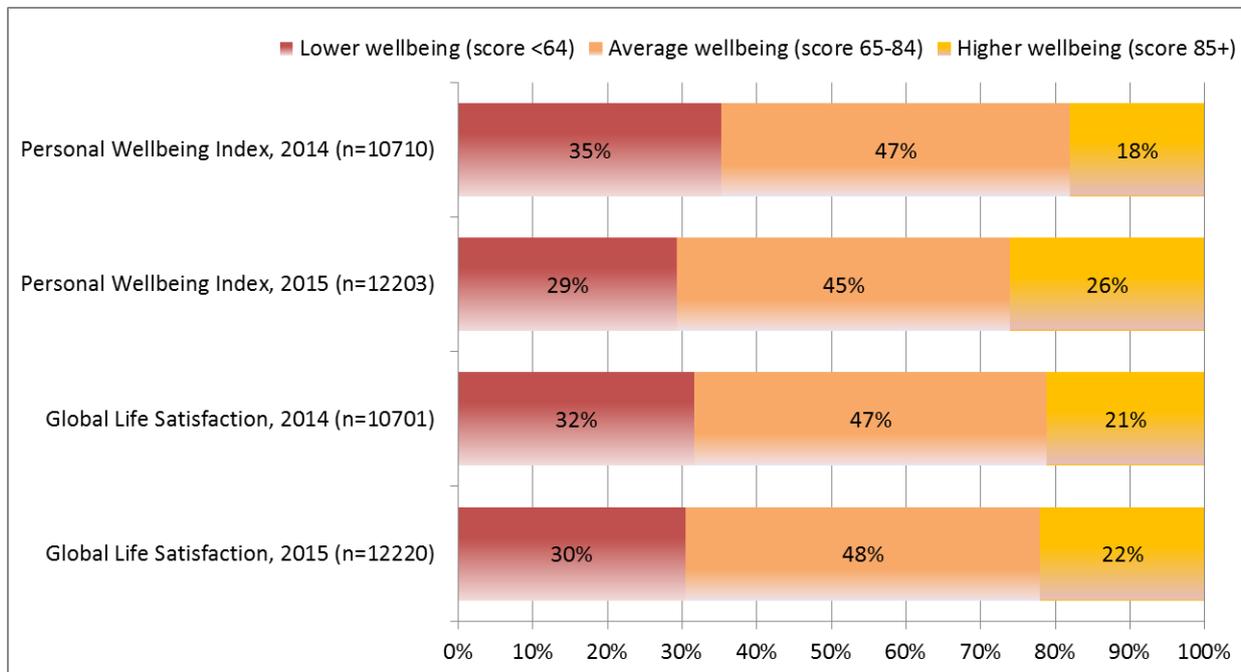


Figure 2.1b Wellbeing of rural and regional Australians, compared for 2014 and 2015

To better understand wellbeing trends, each of the three wellbeing measures was examined in more detail to identify whether people living in different regions or with different socio-demographic characteristics differed in their wellbeing outcomes.

Global life satisfaction

Overall, the average global life satisfaction reported by rural and regional Australians did not change significantly between 2013, 2014 and 2015, with Figure 2.1c² showing that average scores remained almost identical during this period (71.2 in 2013 compared to 70.9 in 2014 and 71.0 in 2015). As noted previously in this report, this is consistent with other studies of wellbeing. The average life satisfaction score for people living in different states varied by a small amount in 2015 (Figure 2.1d).

Global life satisfaction in different regions

On average, residents of Tasmania reported slightly lower levels of wellbeing when compared to rural and regional Australia while other states did not significantly differ from the average.

Despite the apparent similarity of life satisfaction across different states, these ‘average’ scores do mask some important differences. An average score does not always provide a good representation of the distribution of wellbeing within a community. For example, a region in which 50% of people have very poor wellbeing and 50% very high wellbeing will have the same average score as one in which 100% of people have ‘average’ wellbeing.

To better understand the distribution of wellbeing, in addition to showing average scores, Figure 2.1d identifies the proportion of people who reported lower than average and higher than average wellbeing scores. Low scores were defined as those below 60 and high scores as those above 80. These two points were chosen as, across Australia, they are the points that best approximate the lowest and highest quartiles of the population. Those with a score under 60 have *lower* scores than approximately 75% of rural and regional Australians, and those with a score above 80 have *higher* scores than approximately 75% of rural and regional Australians³.

Comparing lowest and highest quartiles is a common approach to understanding variability within a group of people, or between regions (see for example Leslie et al. 2007). While those in the lowest quartile do not all have excessively low scores, their wellbeing can be confidently said to be poorer than average. Similarly, those in the highest quartile can be confidently said to have higher than average levels of wellbeing. This is a conservative approach to showing higher and lower than average scores, which is used throughout this report to help examine the variability between different places and different groups of people, while not focusing solely on extremely high or low scores. When looked at this way, it is possible to see greater differences between states than are apparent when looking only at average scores. In particular, people were more likely to report a lower than average level of wellbeing (defined as a score in the lowest 25% across Australia) if they lived in South Australia, Western Australia, or Tasmania. However, in all these cases, the confidence intervals overlap, meaning it is not possible to definitively state that residents of these states are more likely to have poor wellbeing than in other states.

² See Chapter 1.2 for notes about how to interpret the confidence intervals shown in Figure 2.1c and subsequent figures.

³ Because Global Life Satisfaction is measured on an 11 point scale, the cut off points do not have exactly 25% of people scoring below and above them respectively nationwide – instead, they represent the score that comes closest to a true quartile.

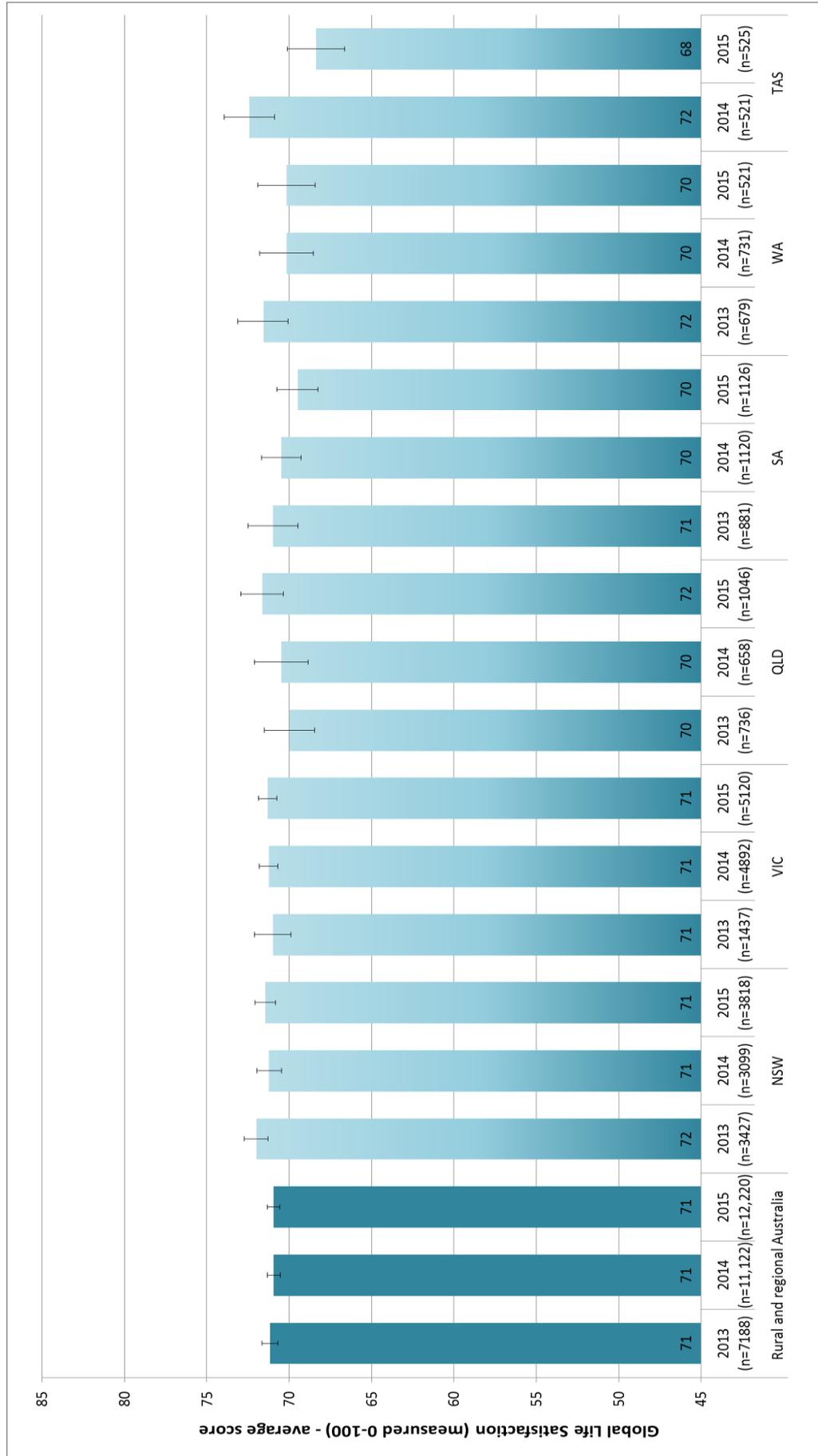


Figure 2.1.c Global Life Satisfaction, 2013 to 2015, by state⁴

⁴ The sample achieved in the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory was too small to produce separate results from these territories in 2015. The state of Tasmania was included in the Regional Wellbeing Survey from 2014 onwards; therefore no 2013 data are shown for this state.

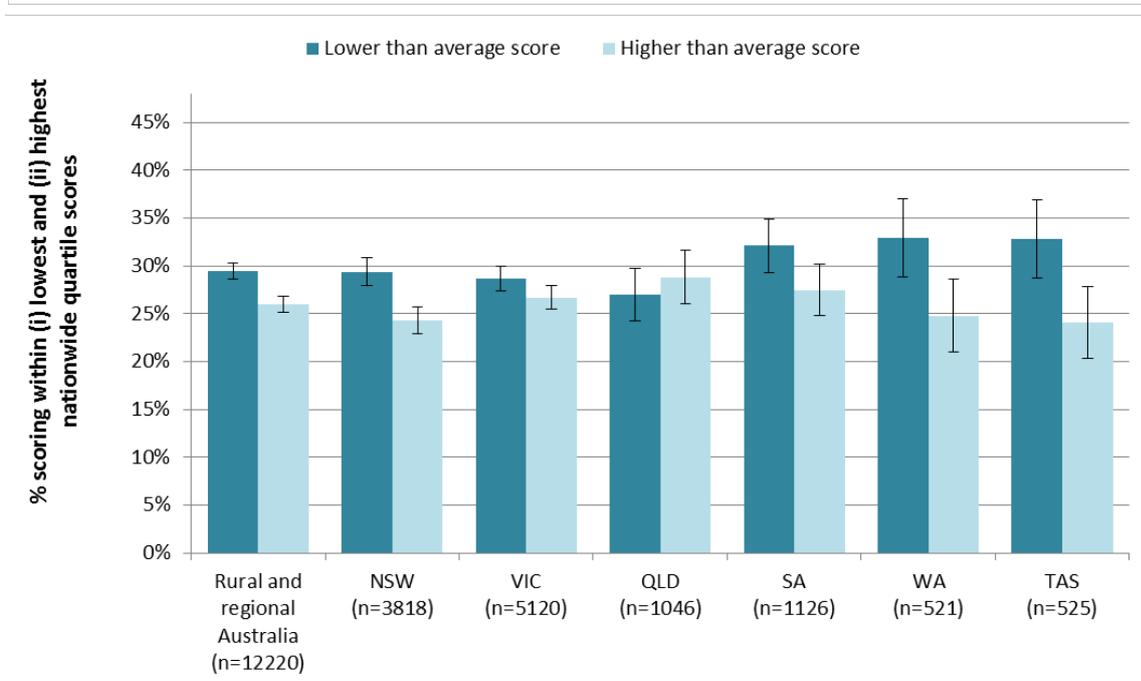
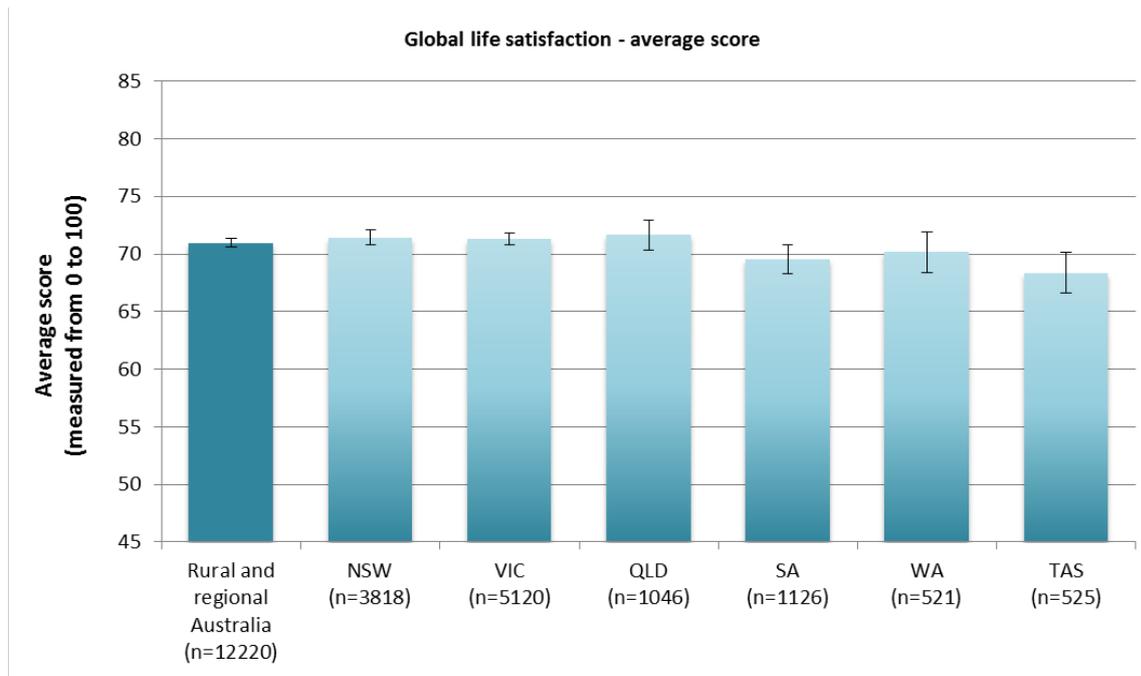


Figure 2.1d Global Life Satisfaction, 2015, by state

State level comparisons, by their nature, ‘even out’ difference within each state, and as such show little differentiation in GLS. Within every state, there are often large variations in wellbeing of people living in different local communities and regions. Figure 2.1e shows the average life satisfaction score reported in different regions, while Figures 2.1f and 2.1g show the proportion of residents reporting lower than average and higher than average life satisfaction. The population living in the following regions had GLS scores below the national average (meaning people living in these regions were more likely to report low scores compared to those in rural and regional Australia more broadly):

- Victoria: rural areas on the southern outskirts of Melbourne (Southern Melbourne)
- Queensland: Fitzroy & Central West

- South Australia: Western & Northern SA; Murraylands & Riverland; Limestone Coast
- Western Australia: Mid-West Gascoyne & Goldfields Esperance
- Tasmania.

The following regions had scores above the national average:

- New South Wales: Far South Coast
- Victoria: rural areas east of Melbourne (including the rural parts of the Yarra Ranges)
- Queensland: Far North Queensland & Torres Strait; Darling Downs & South West
- South Australia: Barossa & Adelaide Metropolitan; Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu & Kangaroo Island.

As well as considering the average score, it is useful to look at the proportion of residents reporting a lower than average and higher than average score. This can help identify whether the average score is a consequence of most people in a region reporting similar wellbeing, or if it is instead the result of many reporting lower than average and many reporting higher than average scores. In 2015, some regions that appeared 'typical' based on their average GLS score had large disparities in the level of wellbeing reported by their residents. In particular a higher than average proportion of people reported low levels of wellbeing in the Murray, Riverina and Southern Inland regions of NSW; the Wheatbelt region of WA; and in Southern Coastal Qld. This suggests that despite mean scores being similar to other parts of Australia, there is a substantial part of the population experiencing poorer than average wellbeing in these regions.

In the majority of regions, there was no significant change in average GLS scores between 2014 and 2015 (Figure 2.1h). There were two exceptions:(i) Tasmania, where the average GLS score was lower in 2015, and (ii) the Mid West Gascoyne & Goldfields Esperance (WA) region, in which there was a decline in the average score (although in the latter this was not statistically significant at the 95% level).

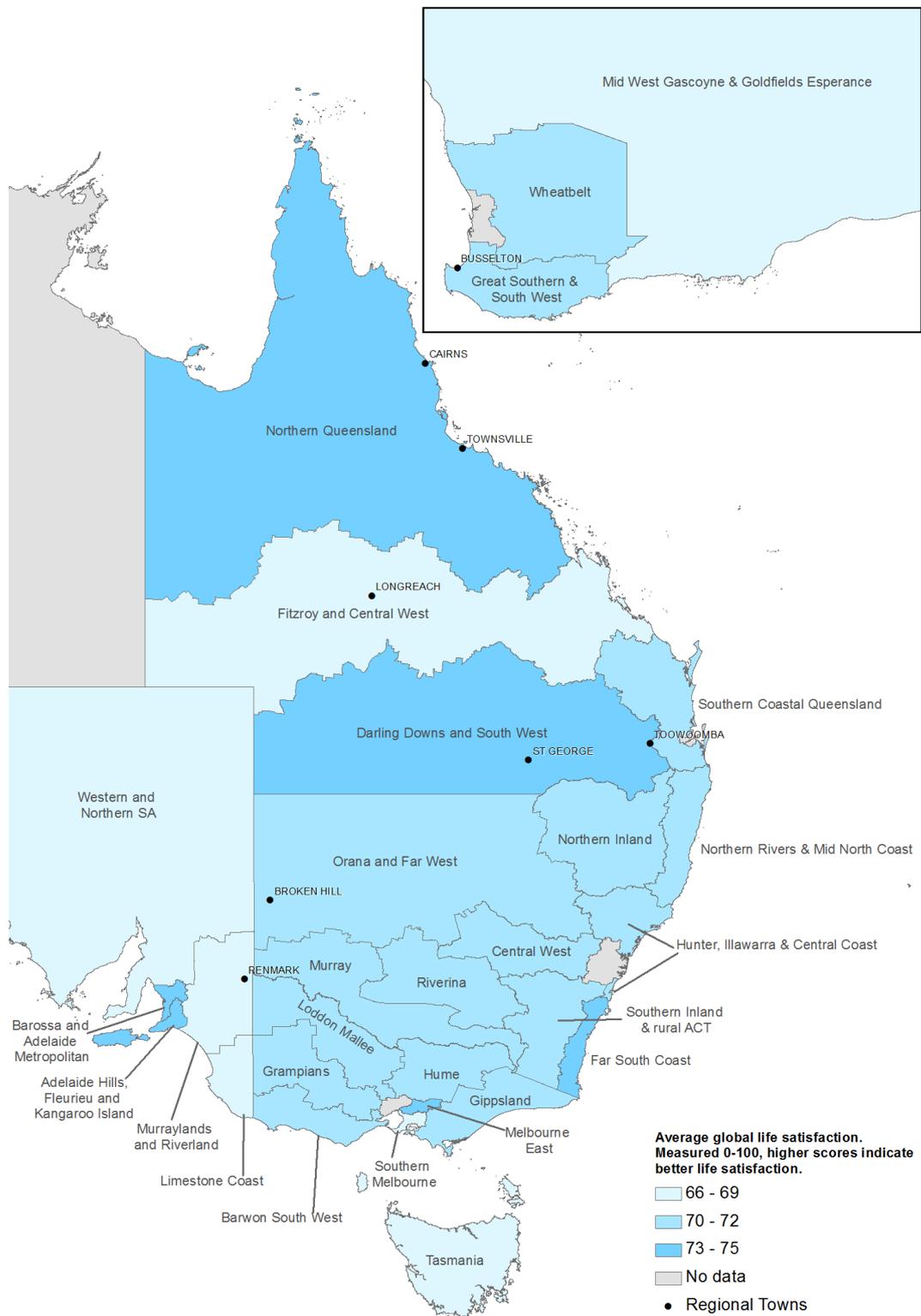


Figure 2.1e Global Life Satisfaction, 2015, by region

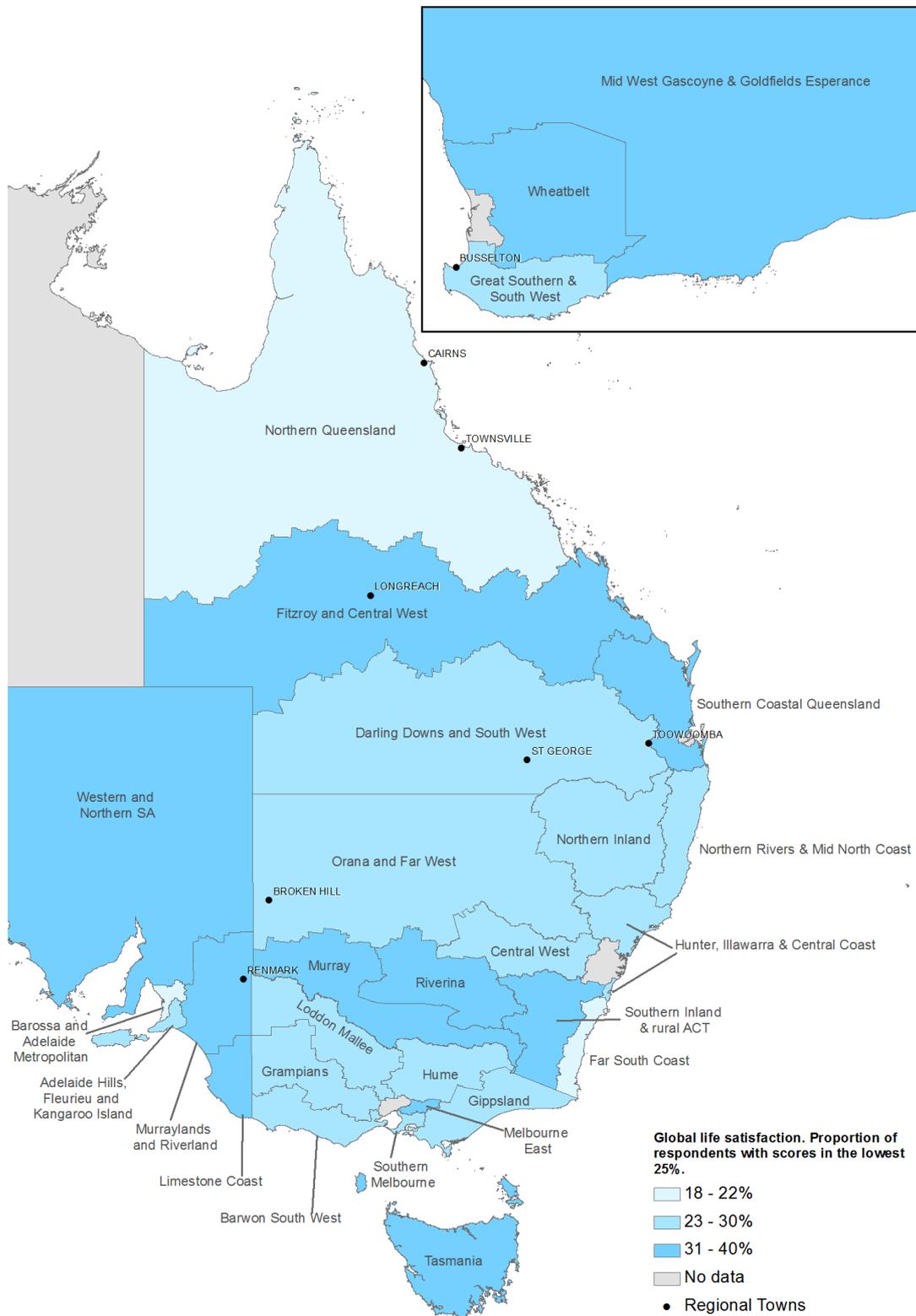


Figure 2.1f Global Life Satisfaction, 2015, proportion of population reporting *lower* than average life satisfaction⁵

⁵ Defined as those with a score lower than the 25th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians.

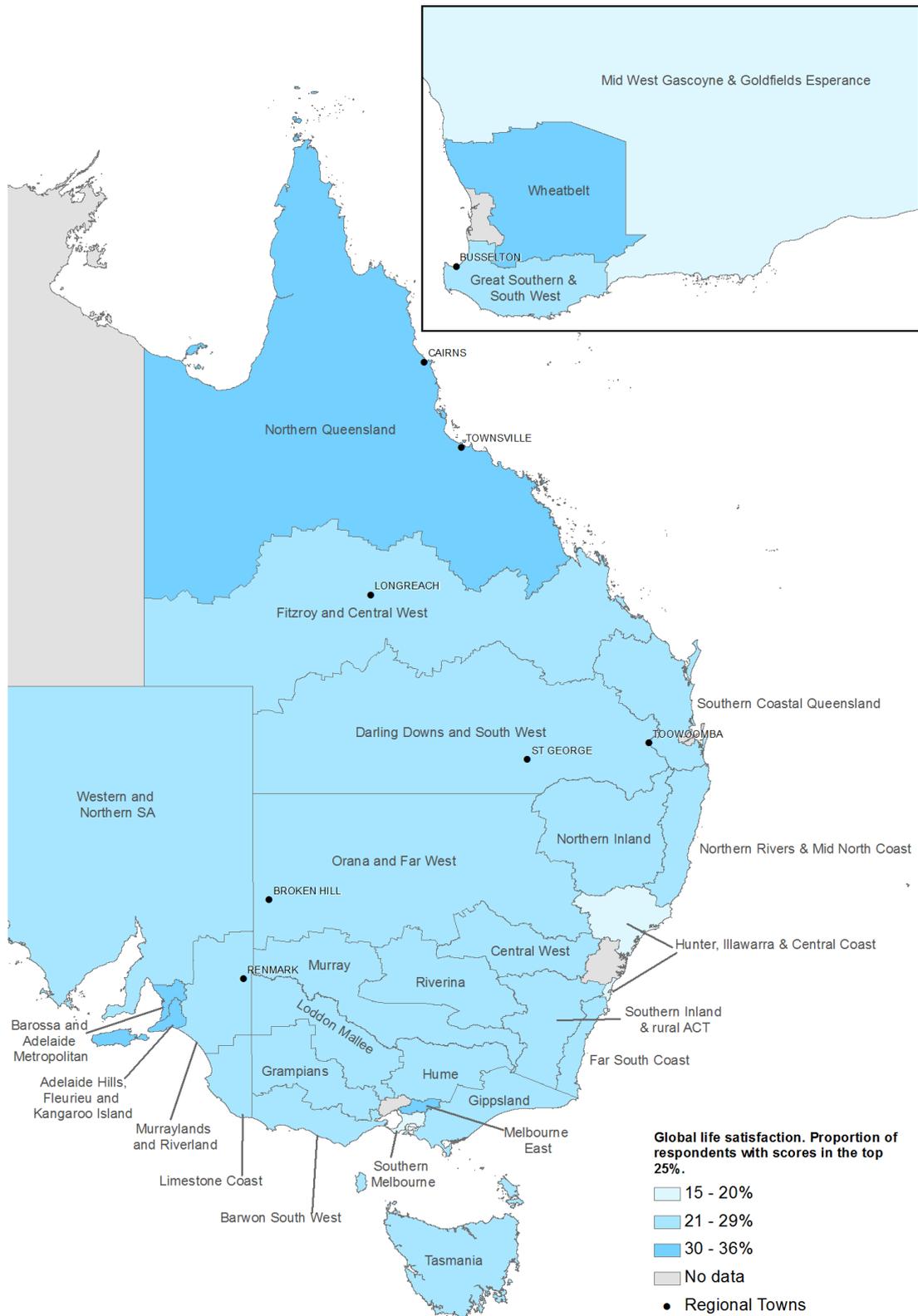


Figure 2.1g Global Life Satisfaction, 2015, proportion of population reporting *higher* than average life satisfaction⁶

⁶ Defined as those with a score higher than the 75th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians.

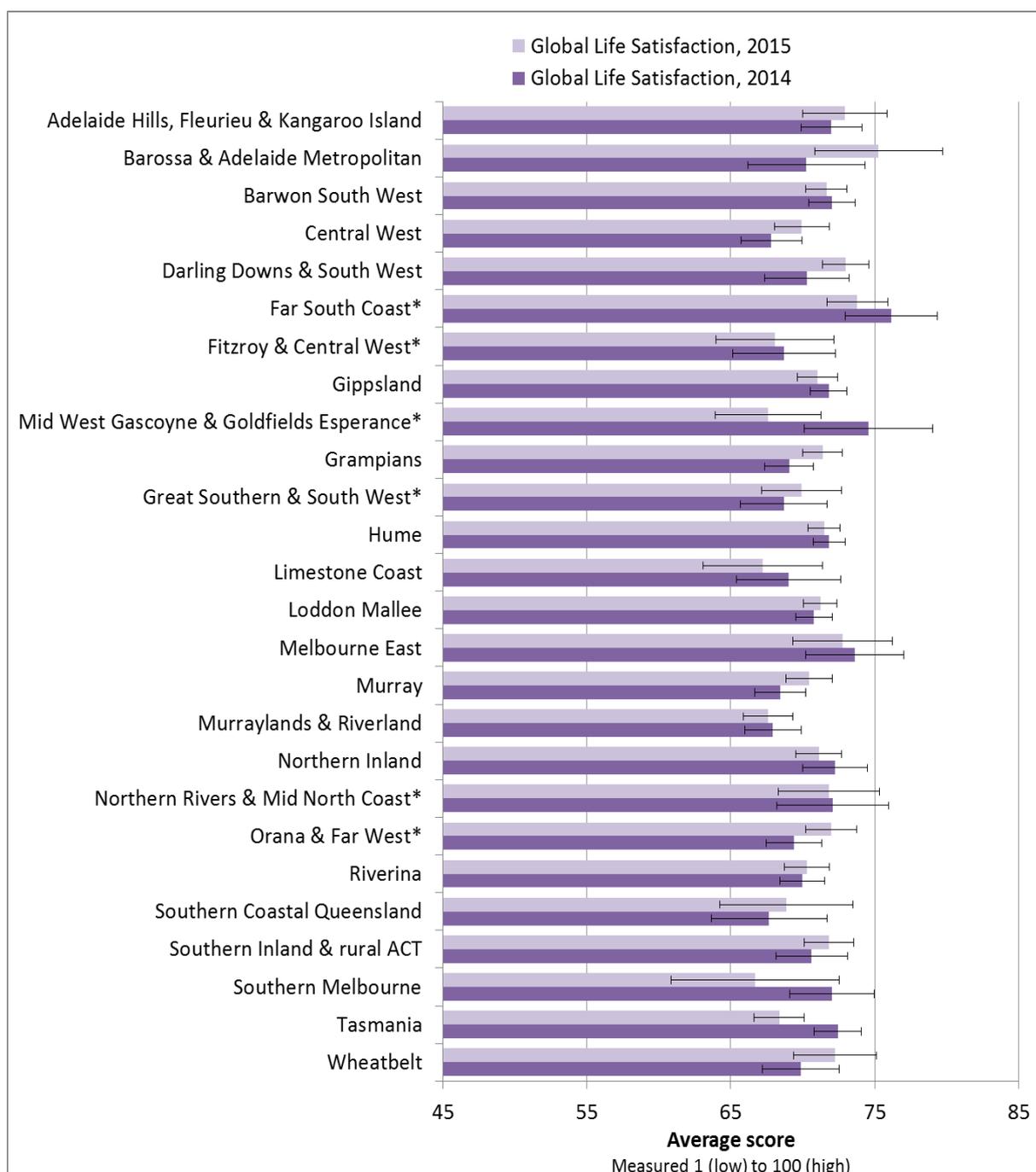


Figure 2.1h Change in Global Life Satisfaction, 2014 to 2015, by region⁷

⁷ A star (*) next to the name of a region indicates that the boundaries of this region differed in 2014 and 2015, and the region is reported using the 2015 region name. In these cases, while the regions was defined slightly differently in 2014 and 2015, the differences identified in these figures still hold when the region is defined identically; for this reason, the results are included. The number of respondents for each region is not shown in the figure: this is due to the complexity of showing the number of respondents for each year while retaining ease of interpretation. Numbers of respondents for each region are provided in the detailed data tables available for download at www.regionalwellbeing.org.au.

Global life satisfaction for different types of people

A person's wellbeing is influenced by many different factors. Major changes in GLS (or PWI) scores are often associated with significant life events such as illness, divorce, shifting house, unemployment or other major changes. While what is going on for any individual person will depend on their life circumstances at that particular point in time, when examined at a 'population level' – meaning across a large group of people - there are some common patterns to wellbeing and how it varies between groups. Figure 2.1i compares average wellbeing scores of (i) men and women, (ii) people of different ages, and (iii) dryland farmers, irrigators, employed non-farmers and people not in employment. The proportion of each group who reported lower and higher than average wellbeing is also shown.

Comparing different groups

Throughout this report, we examine differences between people of (i) different ages, (ii), different genders, and (iii) dryland farmers, irrigators, employed non-farmers and the not employed (retired, carer's duties, students and unemployed people). These groups are compared because results have shown significant differences between these groups and the large sample size.

Many other groups could also be examined. Some of these include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds, and those identifying as 'LGBTIQA' (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intergender, questioning or asexual). Due to the relatively small sample size of these groups (150 to 400 people for each) we are investigating methods to ensure we are able to analyse and produce robust results for groups of people for whom we have relatively small numbers of respondents, and will present findings for them in future reports.

The rural and regional Australians who most commonly reported high levels of wellbeing in 2014 were those aged 65 and older, and dryland farmers. Those who most commonly reported lower levels of wellbeing were people aged below 50 and those who were not employed.

While most results were identical to those for 2014, there were some notable differences. In particular, the pattern of farmer wellbeing differed from the non-farming community with a higher proportion of irrigators reporting both lower than average *and* higher than average wellbeing. This may indicate greater diversity in the wellbeing of irrigators in 2015 compared to 2014. With farming conditions noted as likely to contribute to a farmer's life satisfaction (see Schirmer et al. 2015b); this indicates there are likely to be more irrigators experiencing both challenging and good farming conditions in 2015 compared to 2014. This finding may also reflect broader changes occurring in some irrigation-dependent communities. For example, in 2015 a higher than average proportion of people living in the Murray and Riverina regions of NSW reported low levels of wellbeing – both regions with high levels of irrigated agriculture.

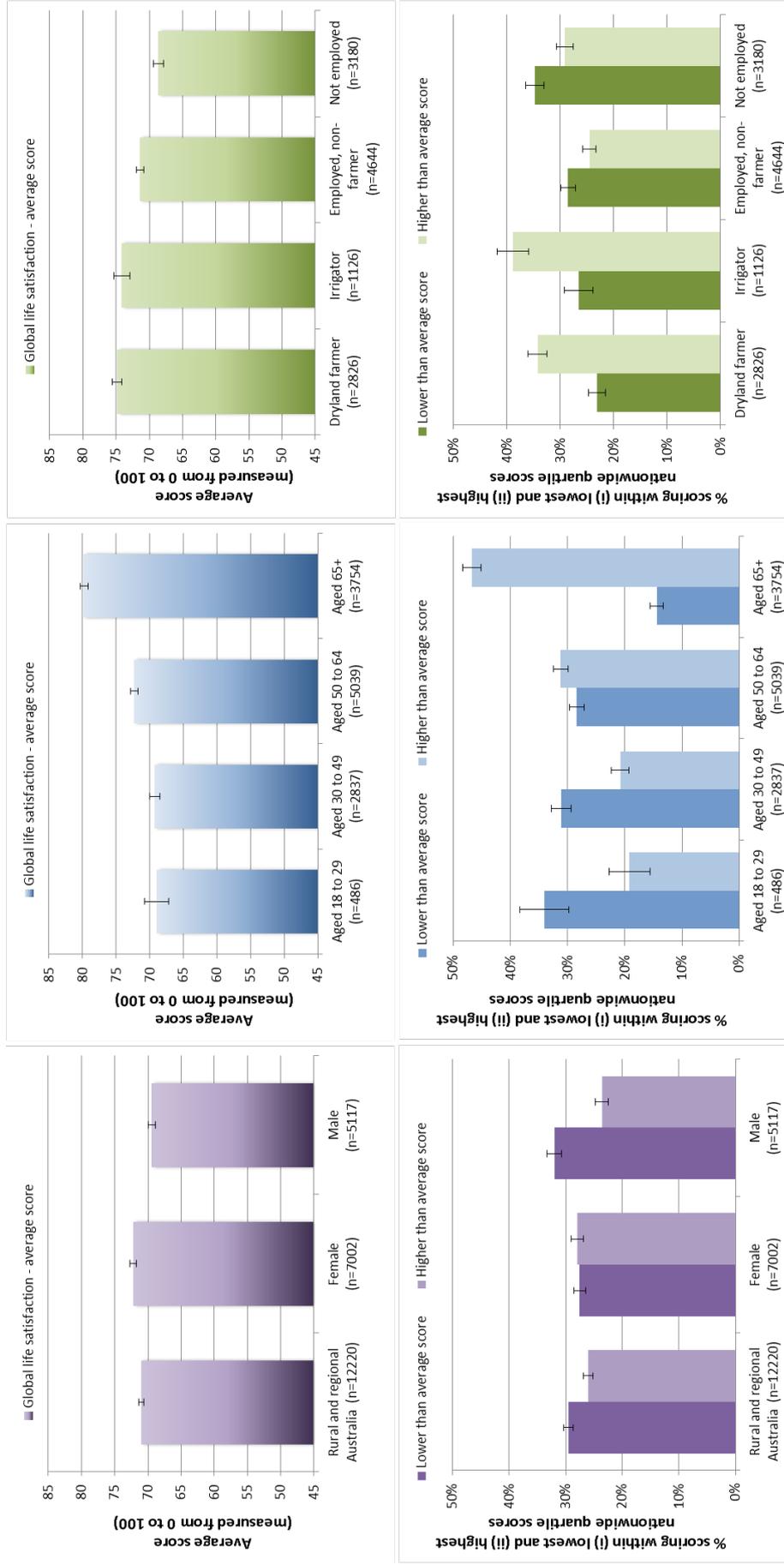


Figure 2.1i Global Life Satisfaction, 2015, by group

Personal Wellbeing Index

The Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) differs from the GLS wellbeing measure in that it asks a series of questions about how satisfied a person is with multiple domains of their life that contribute to their overall wellbeing. These domains include a person's satisfaction with their health, standard of living, what they are achieving in life, personal relationships, community connectedness, personal safety and future security. Responses to these items are combined into a single measure of wellbeing: the PWI. Like the GLS, the PWI is a single measure reflecting overall individual wellbeing. Unlike the GLS, it accounts for concept complexity by summarising different levels of satisfaction across several domains, each of which can be analysed separately if necessary. This means it is not only possible to examine overall wellbeing when analysing the PWI, but also *which* aspects of their lives people are more and less satisfied with.

The PWI in different regions

Figure 2.1j shows the average PWI score for rural and regional Australia as a whole and for the different states. Similar to the GLS, there were not significant differences between states. The average PWI score for rural and regional Australia was 71 (as was the average GLS score). However, there were some important differences between the PWI and the GLS measure: in most states, the PWI was slightly higher than the GLS, but particularly in Tasmania. This indicates that the PWI, in some cases, may reflect different aspects of wellbeing compared to a person's overall 'life satisfaction' score. Figure 2.1j also identifies the proportion of people who reported scores lower than average and higher than average. Those with a mean score under 60 had *lower* scores than approximately 75% of rural and regional Australians, and those with a mean score above 80 had *higher* scores than approximately 75% of rural and regional Australians. The results suggest no significant differences in the proportion of people reporting below and above average scores at state level, as all differences in scores fall within the confidence intervals.

Figure 2.1k shows the average life satisfaction score reported in different regions, while Figures 2.1l and 2.1m show the proportion of residents with lower and higher than average PWI scores. Results were broadly similar to those for the GLS wellbeing measure, with the following exceptions:

- Southern Coastal Qld, Darling Downs & South West (Qld), and Northern Qld regions all had poorer wellbeing scores when measured using the PWI compared to the GLS, indicating that in these regions many people rate their satisfaction with several aspects of their life poorly, yet, overall, consider themselves to have typical or high levels of life satisfaction
- The Fitzroy & Central West (Qld) region had better wellbeing scores when measuring using PWI compared to GLS, indicating that many people in this region may be dissatisfied with one or two key aspects of their lives, and these areas are contributing particularly strongly to their rating of their overall life satisfaction (the PWI weights each of the seven areas of life it assesses equally, and these results suggest some of the seven may be influencing a person's ratings of their overall life satisfaction more than others, resulting in a GLS score that differs to the PWI).

When PWI scores for regions that had a large enough sample size in both 2014 and 2015 were compared (Figure 2.1n), it was found that, unlike GLS scores, there were several regions in which PWI changed significantly between the two years. The Mid West Gascoyne & Goldfields Esperance

region had a decline in PWI scores that was statistically significant, while six regions had significant increases in wellbeing: the Orana & Far West (NSW), Central West (NSW), Murray (NSW), Hume (Vic), Loddon Mallee (Vic) and Fitzroy & Central West (Qld) regions. However, the PWI score in Tasmania did not change significantly, whereas the GLS score declined.

The PWI for different people

When PWI scores were compared for different groups (Figure 2.1o), these results were similar to those for the GLS measure. Wellbeing was highest for those aged over 65, irrigators and dryland farmers; and lowest for those who were not employed and those aged under 50. Women on average had higher PWI scores than men.

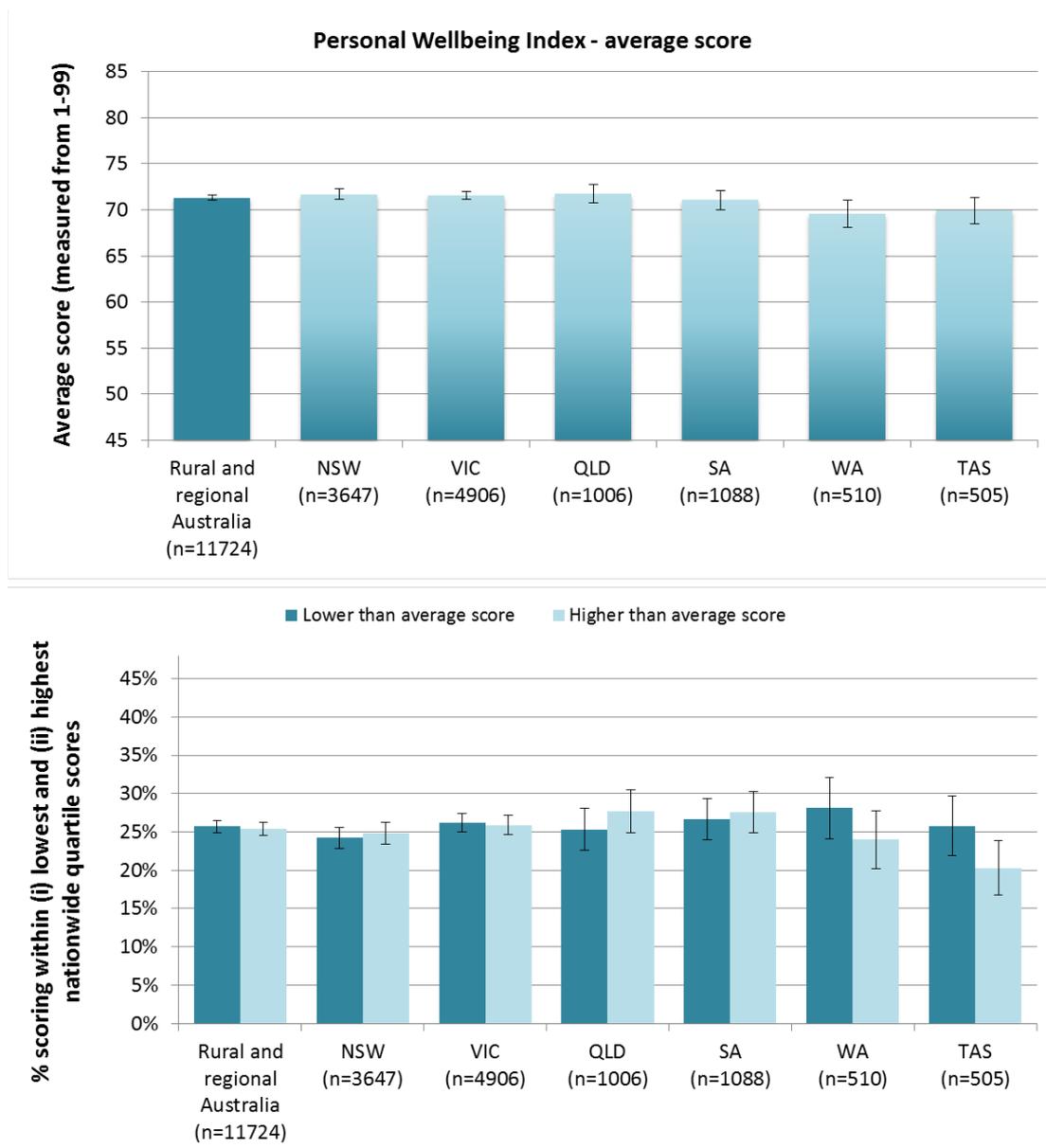


Figure 2.1j Personal Wellbeing Index, 2015, by state

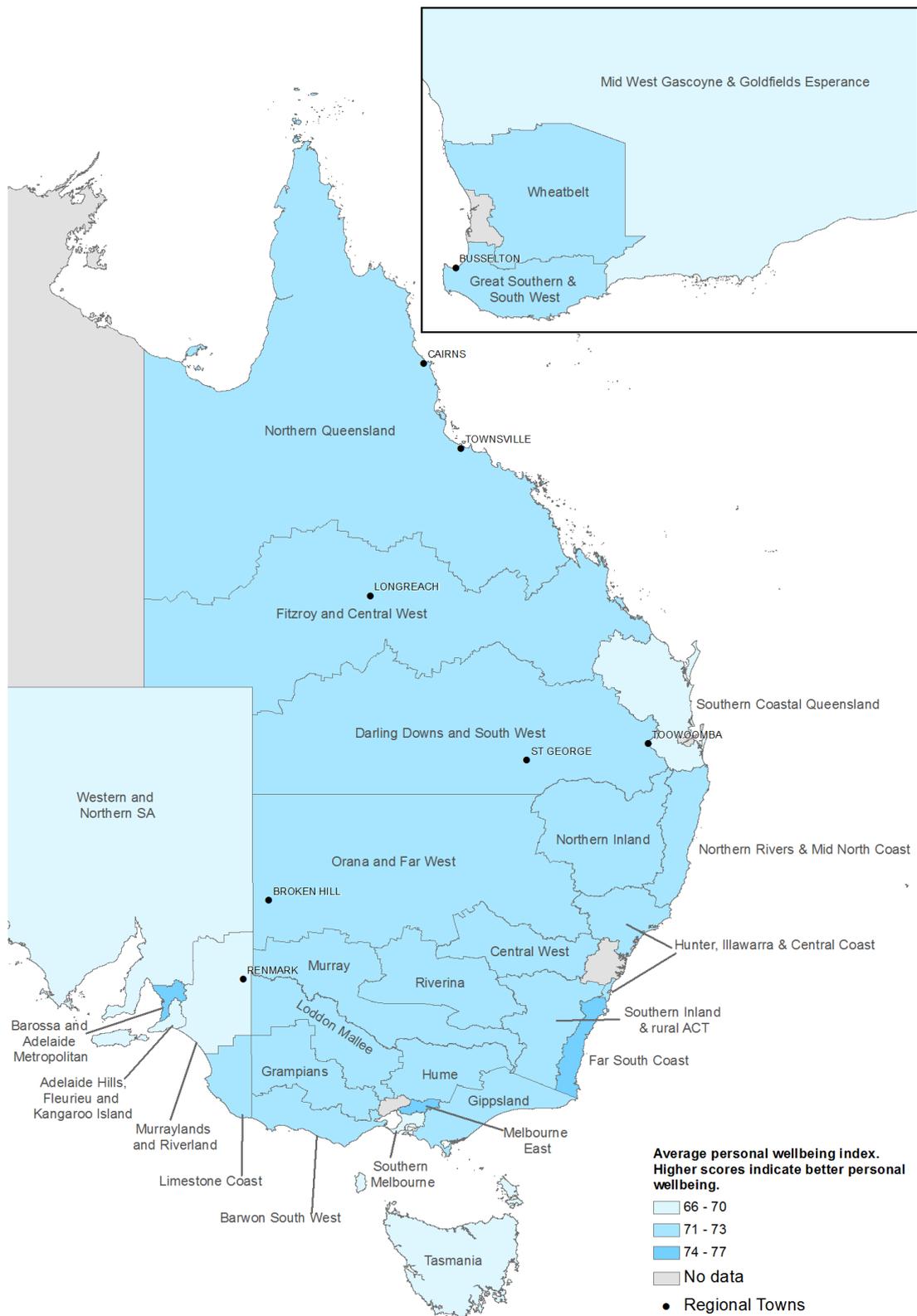


Figure 2.1k Personal Wellbeing Index, 2015, by region

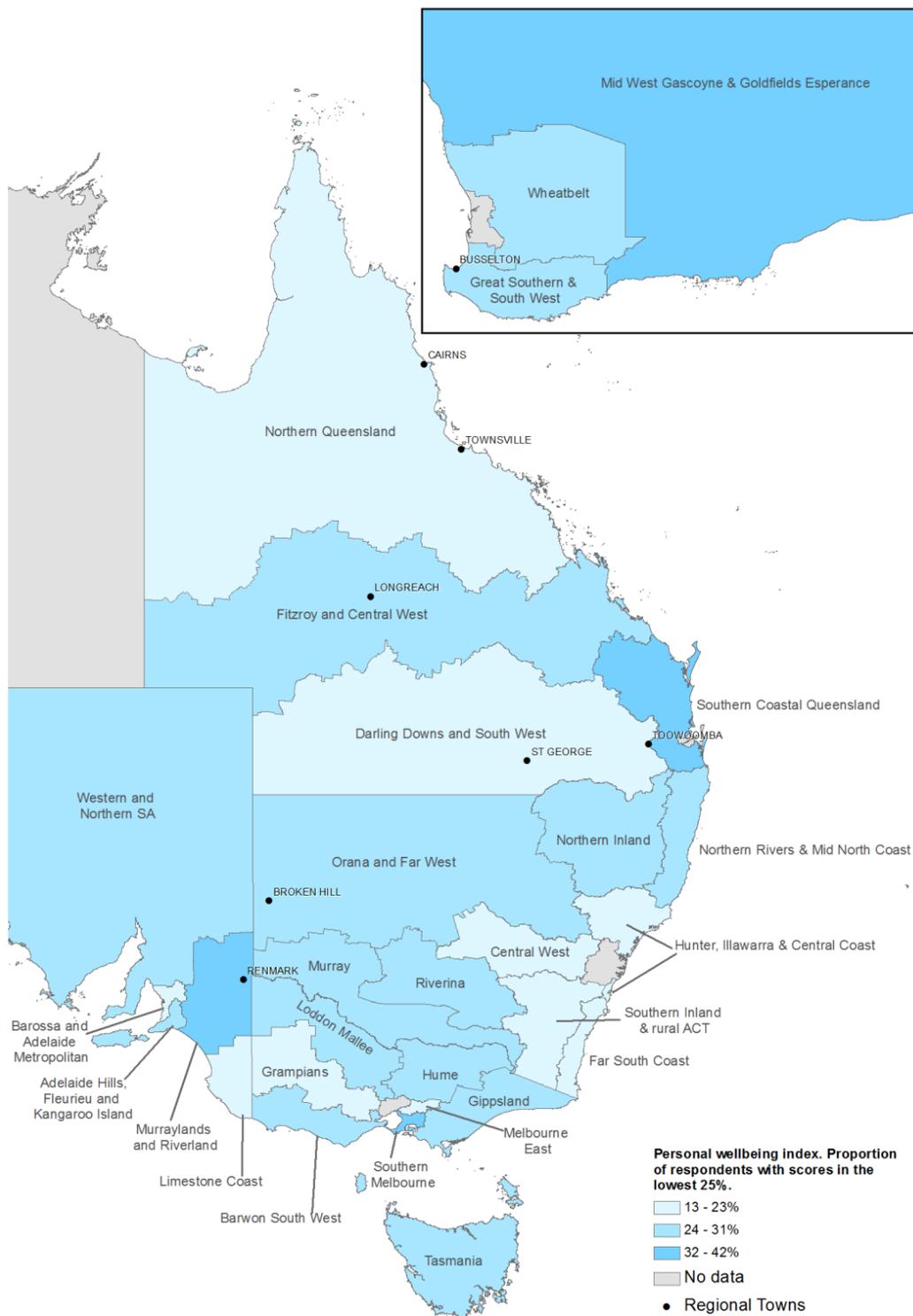


Figure 2.1 Personal Wellbeing Index, 2015, proportion of population reporting *lower* than average wellbeing⁸

⁸ Defined as those with a score lower than the 25th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians.

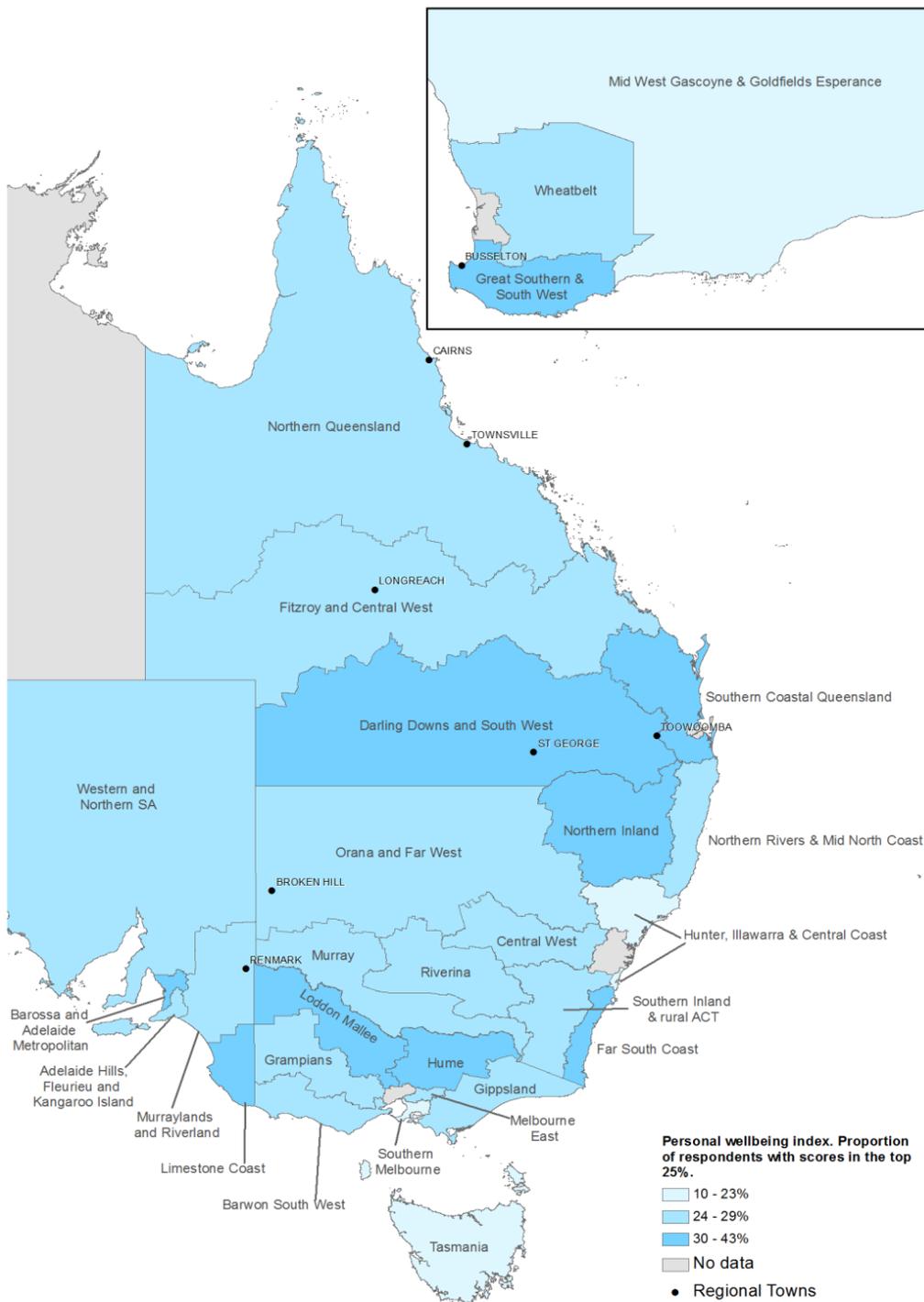


Figure 2.1m Personal Wellbeing Index, 2015, proportion of population reporting *higher* than average wellbeing⁹

⁹ Defined as those with a score lower than the 25th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians.



Figure 2.1n Change in the Personal Wellbeing Index, 2014 to 2015, by region¹⁰

¹⁰ A star (*) next to the name of a region indicates that the boundaries of this region differed in 2014 and 2015, and the region is reported using the 2015 region name. See the footnote to Figure 2.1h for further details of how to interpret this figure.

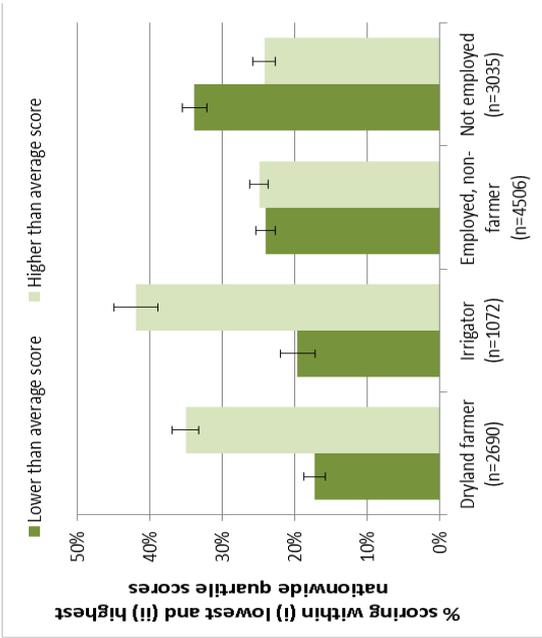
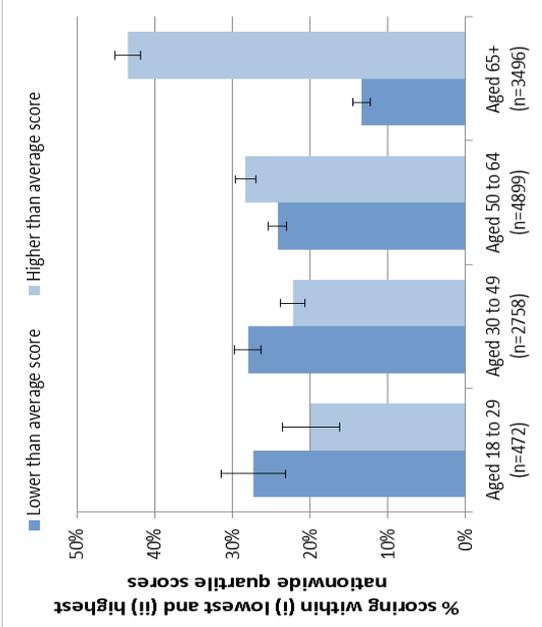
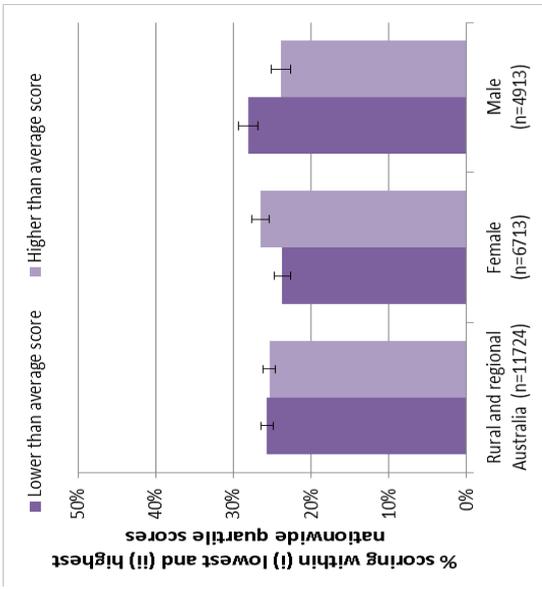
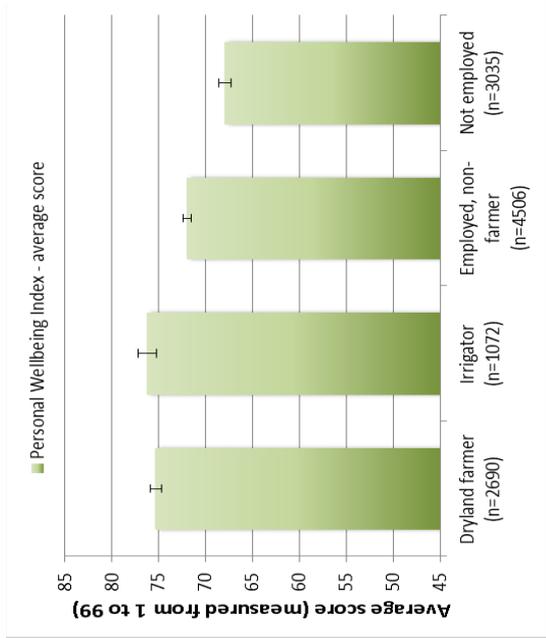
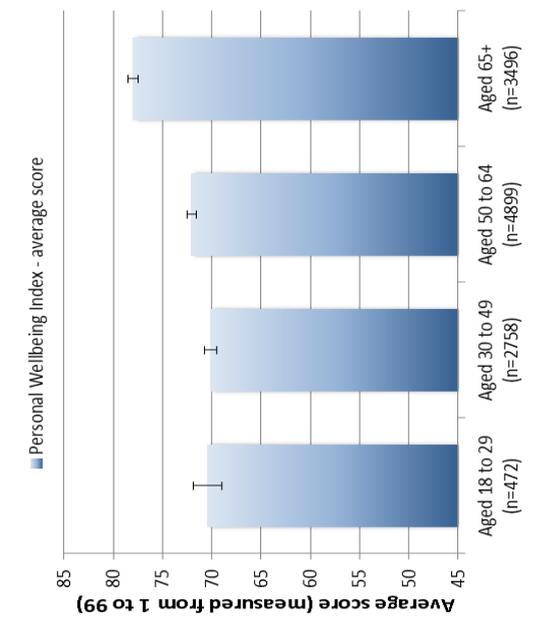
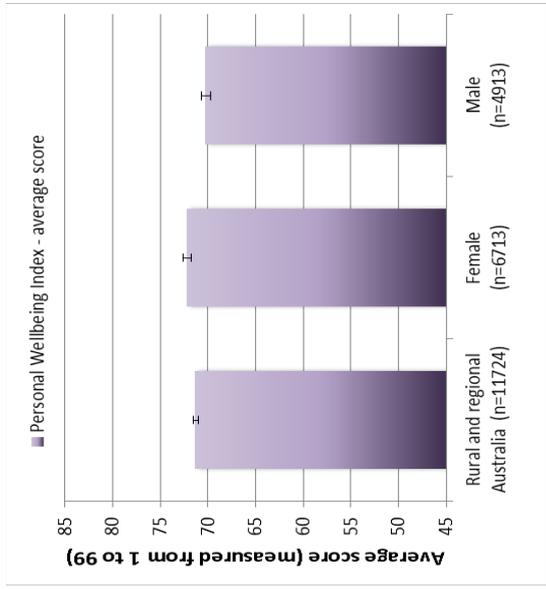


Figure 2.1o Personal Wellbeing Index, 2015, by group

Which parts of their lives are people most (and least) satisfied with?

A key benefit of examining the PWI is that it identifies a person's level of satisfaction with different aspects of their life. People are asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their standard of living, their health, what they are currently achieving in life, their personal relationships, how safe they feel, feeling part of their community, and their future security.

As can be seen in Figure 2.1p, in 2015 rural and regional Australians were most satisfied with how safe they felt and their standard of living, and least satisfied with their future security, health and what they were currently achieving in life. These levels of satisfaction varied, however, when compared for people living in different states and in different groups.

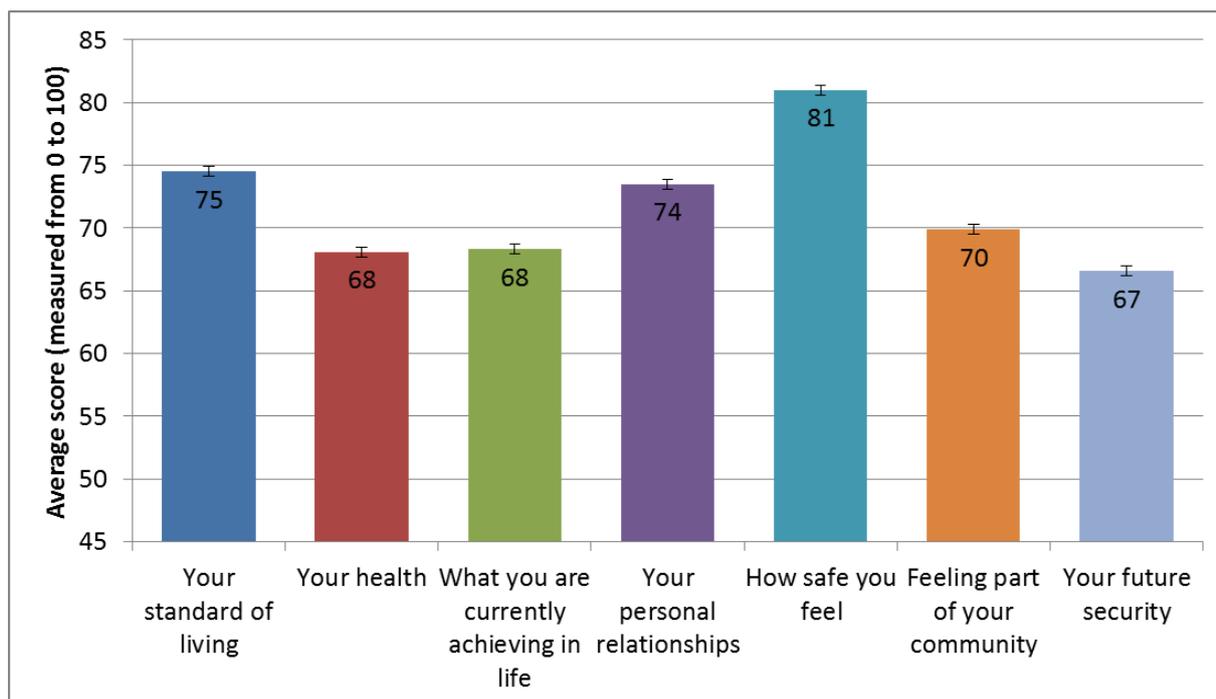


Figure 2.1p Average level of satisfaction with different aspects of life, rural and regional Australia (n=12192)

When looked at by state (Figure 2.1q), compared to the national average:

- Tasmanians had lower than average satisfaction with their standard of living, health, what they were achieving in life, and relationships, but their level of satisfaction with other areas was similar to the country as a whole.
- South Australians had lower than average satisfaction with their standard of living, health, and what they were achieving in life, but higher than average satisfaction with feeling part of their community
- Western Australians were less likely to report being satisfied with how safe they feel, their future security, and their personal relationships
- Queensland residents were less likely to report being satisfied with their future security and slightly more likely to be satisfied with their personal relationships
- Victorians were slightly more satisfied with their standard of living
- New South Wales residents were slightly more likely to be satisfied with how safe they felt than those in other parts of rural and regional Australia.

When looked at by group (Figure 2.1r), compared to the national average:

- Women were more satisfied than men with their standard of living, health, achievements feeling part of the community and relationships
- Those aged 65 and over were more satisfied with all aspects of their lives than younger people, but particularly with their security, safety, relationships and feeling part of the community
- Farmers (both dryland farmers and irrigators) were more satisfied with all PWI domains than non-farmers
- Those who were not employed were less satisfied with all aspects of their life than those in employment, particularly their health, their current achievements, and feeling part of their community.

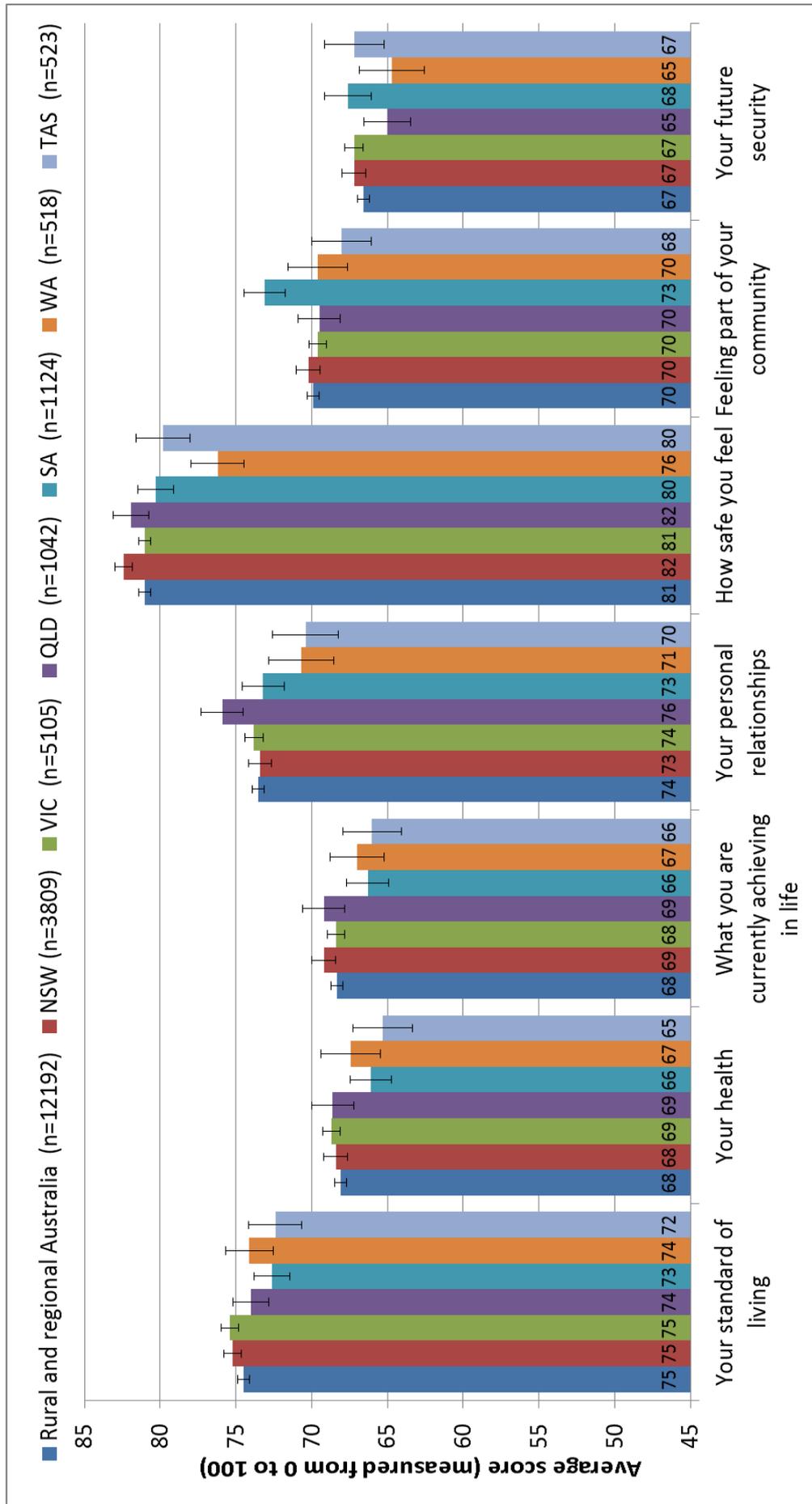


Figure 2.1q Satisfaction with different aspects of life, 2015, by state

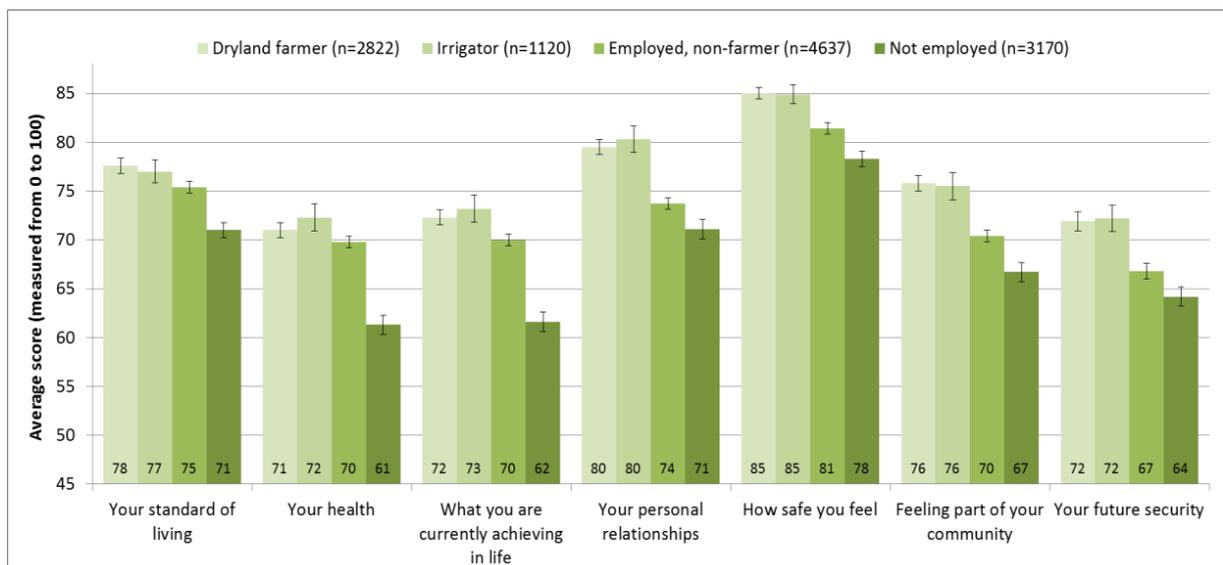
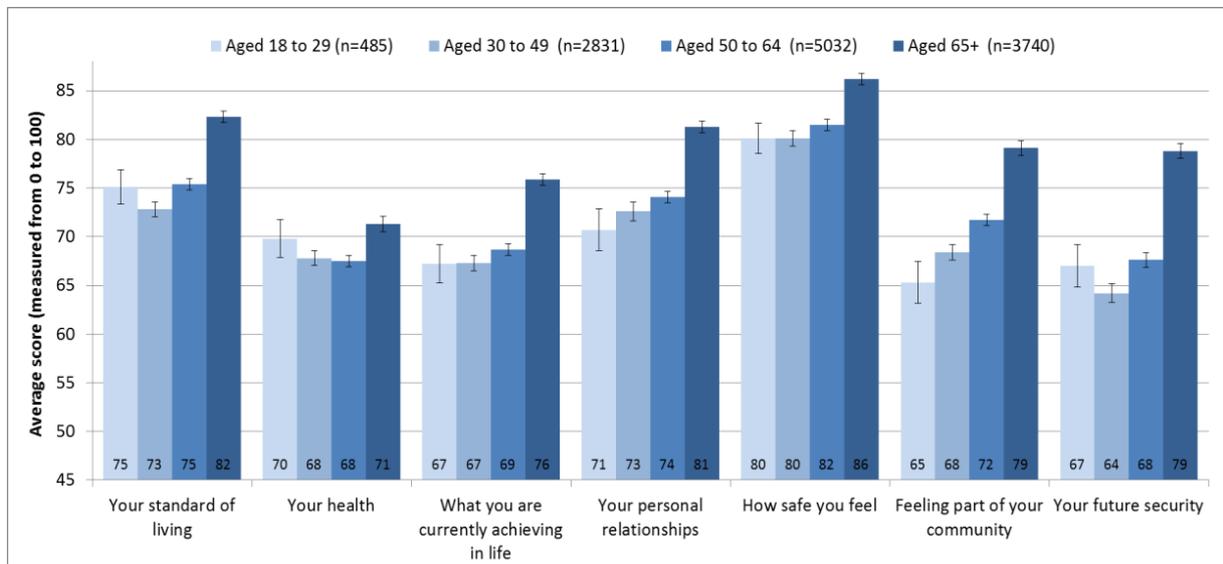
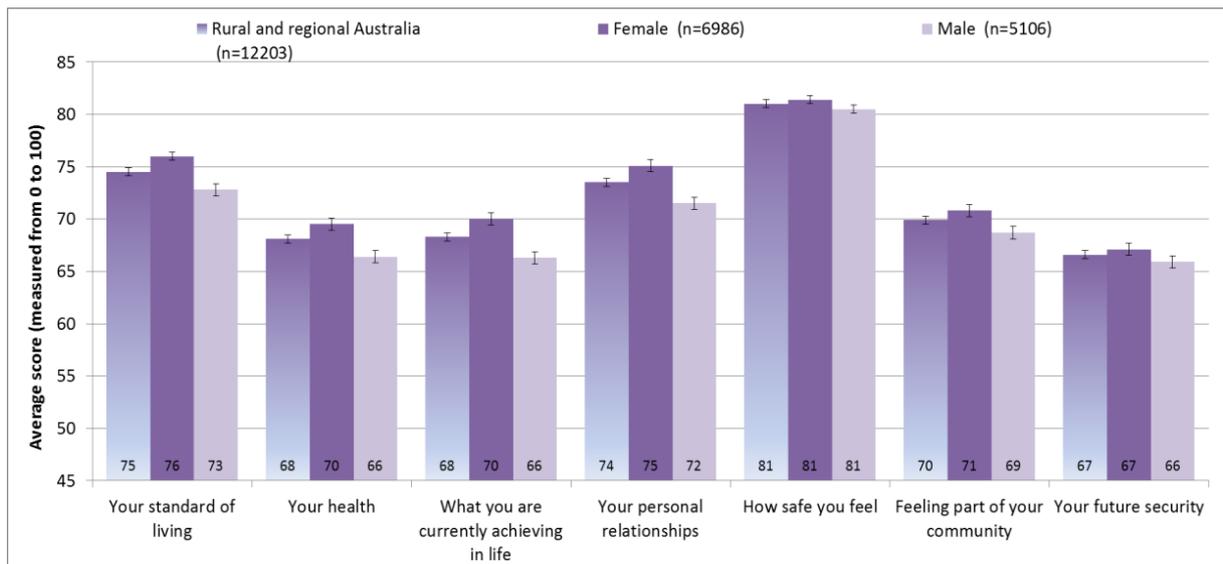


Figure 2.1r Satisfaction with different aspects of life, 2015, by group

Worthwhileness - Feeling life is worthwhile

In 2015, a eudaimonic measure of wellbeing was included in the Regional Wellbeing Survey for the first time: participants were asked to rate the extent to which they felt 'the things you do in your life are worthwhile'. As noted earlier, rural and regional Australians were slightly more likely to report feeling the things they did in their lives were worthwhile than to report feeling satisfied with life. Across Australia, the average 'worthwhileness' score people gave their lives was 77 out of a possible 100, compared to a score of 71 for their overall life satisfaction and 72 for their Personal Wellbeing Index. This reflects the importance of asking about multiple dimensions of wellbeing. The eudaimonic measure examines how meaningful people find their lives, and the findings suggest that most rural and regional Australians find the things they do in life very meaningful – sometimes even when they are not highly satisfied with their lives.

Figure 2.1s shows that people living in Tasmania, and to a lesser extent South Australia, were slightly less likely than those in other parts of rural and regional Australia to report feeling that the things they did in their life were worthwhile, although the differences were small. Figures 2.1t, 2.1u and 2.1v show that while in most regions variation in people's sense of 'worthwhileness' was similar to the variation in the GLS and PWI measures of wellbeing, there were some differences. In particular, people living in northern NSW were highly likely to report finding their lives meaningful, but did not report higher than average levels of life satisfaction.

Women were more likely to report feeling that their life is worthwhile compared to men, as were people aged 65 and older compared to other age groups, and farmers compared to non-farmers (Figure 2.1w). Those who were not employed were least likely to report feeling a strong sense of worthwhileness.

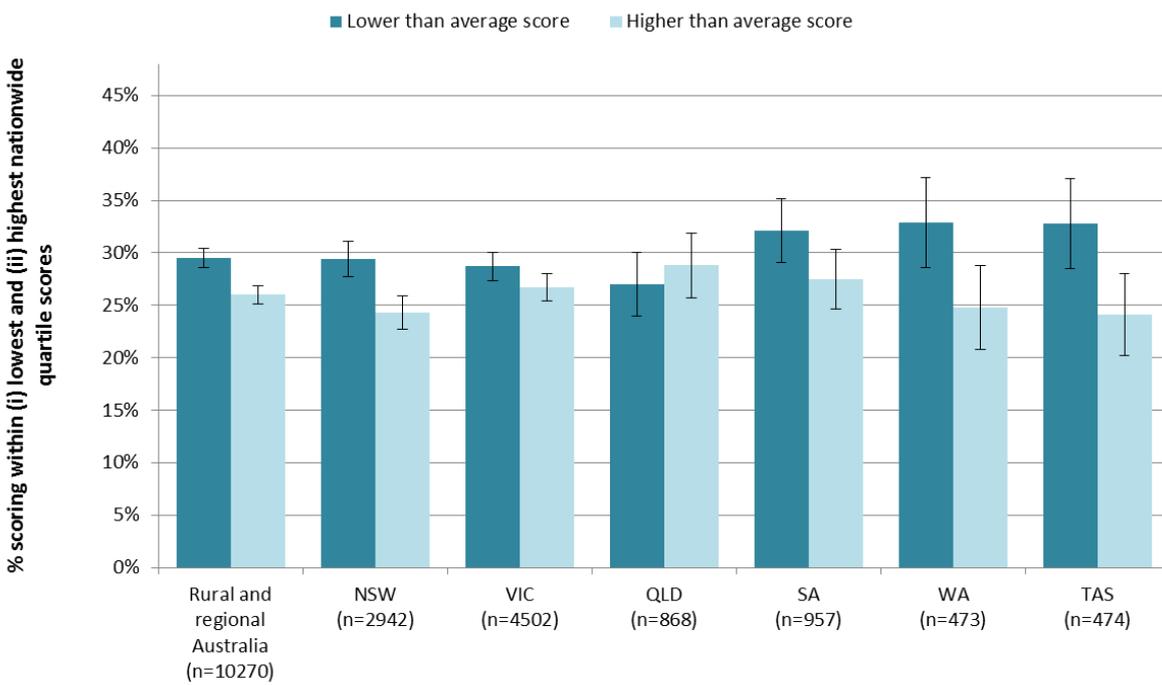


Figure 2.1s Feeling life is worthwhile, 2015, by state¹¹

¹¹ See Appendix 1 for a list of the cut-off scores used for 'lower than average' and 'higher than average' in this figure, and subsequent figures.

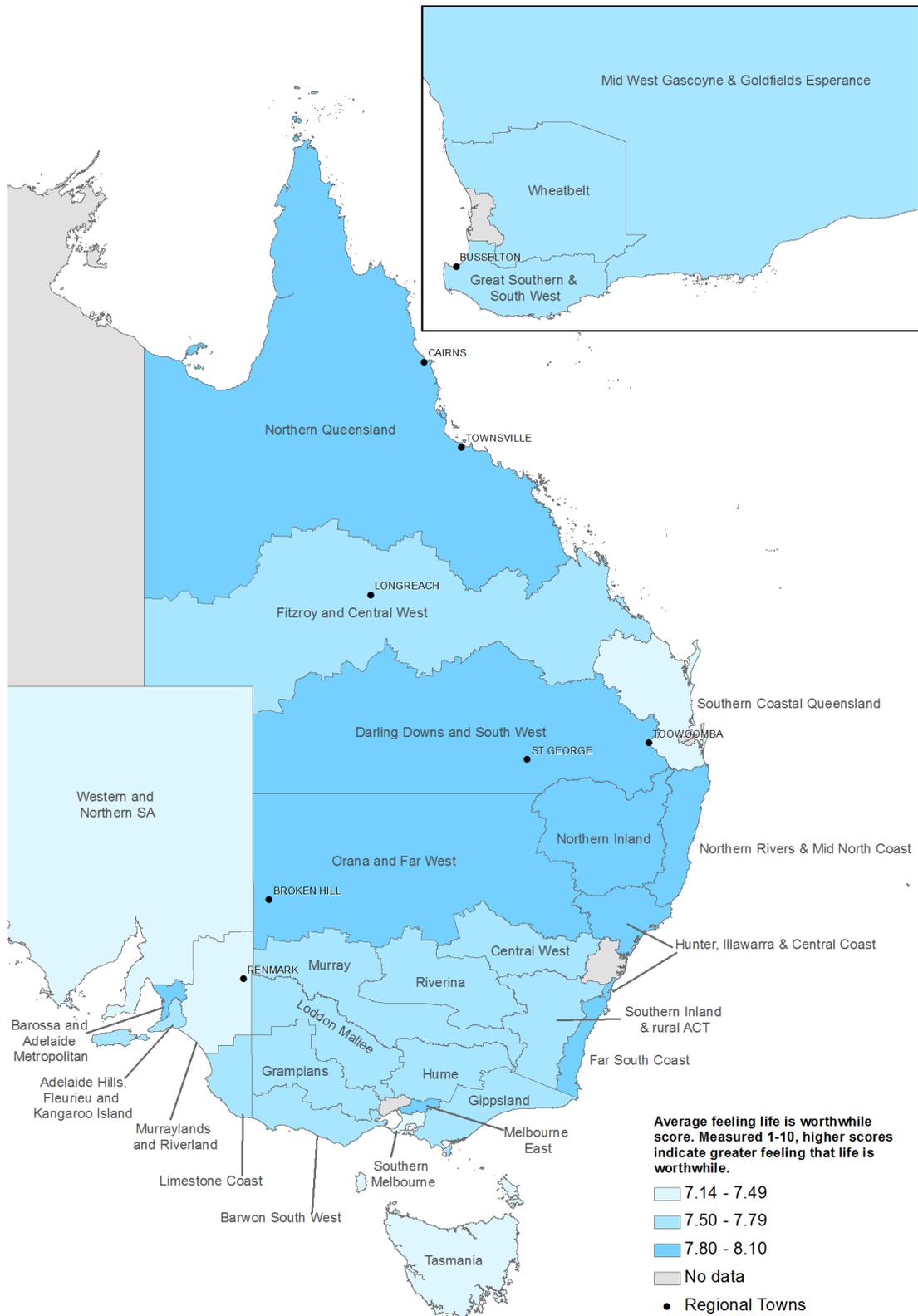


Figure 2.1t Feeling life is worthwhile, 2015, by region

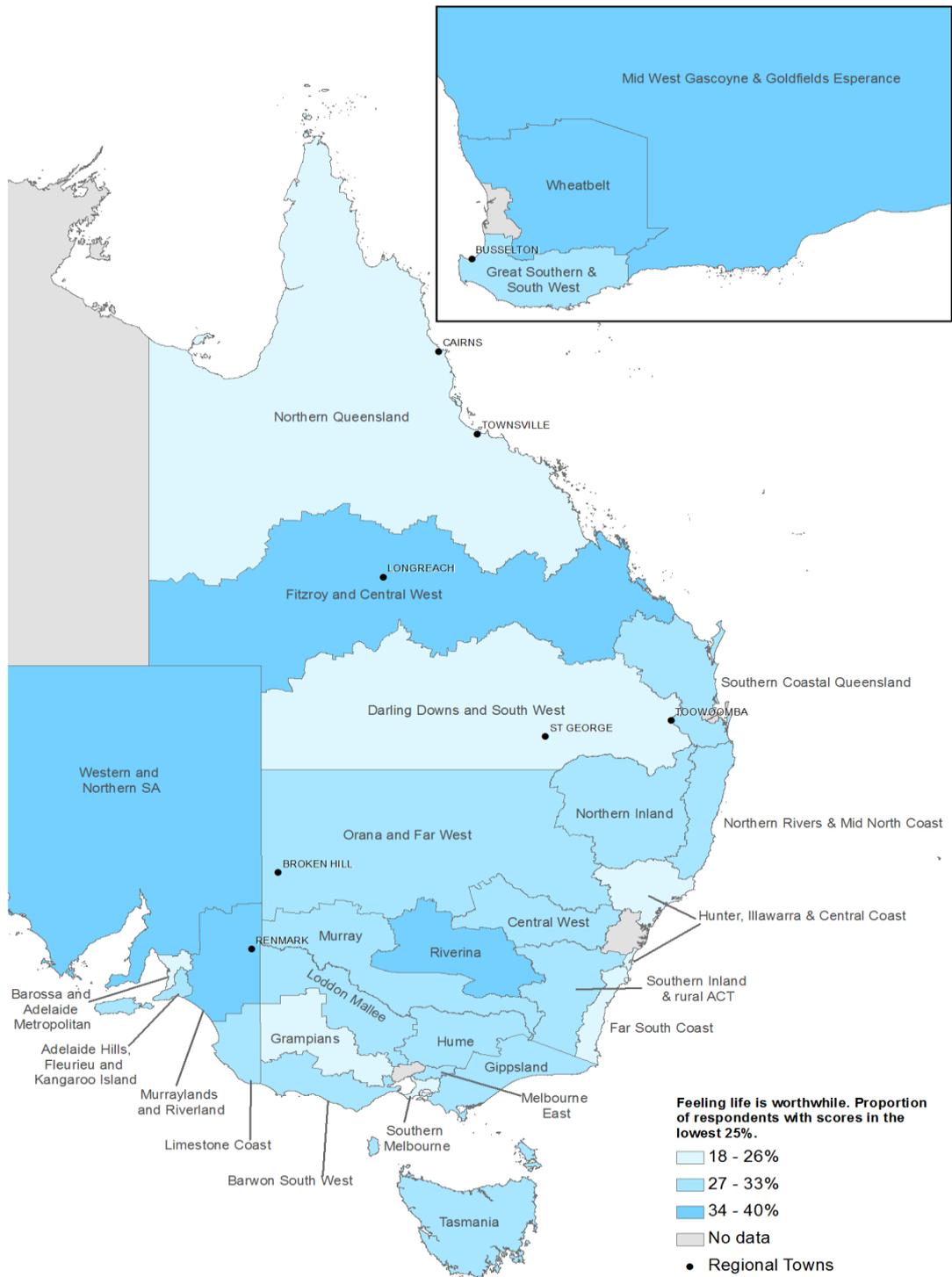


Figure 2.1u Feeling life is worthwhile, 2015, proportion of population reporting lower than average life worthwhileness¹²

¹² Defined as those with a score lower than the 25th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians.

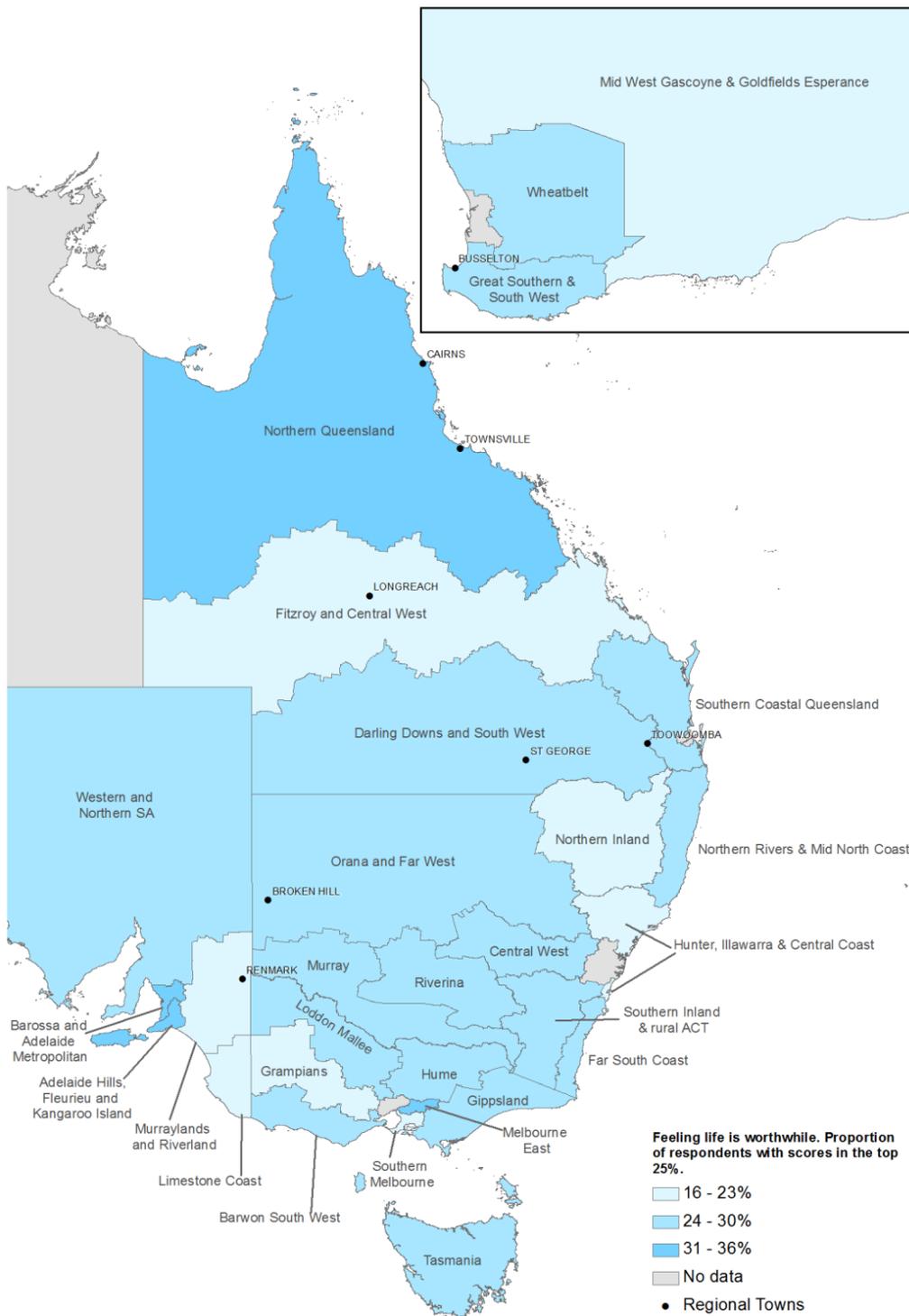


Figure 2.1v Feeling life is worthwhile, 2015, proportion of population reporting *higher* than average life worthwhileness

¹³ Defined as those with a score higher than the 75th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians.

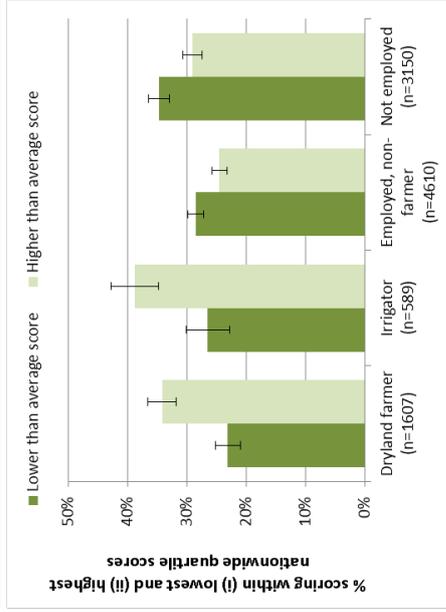
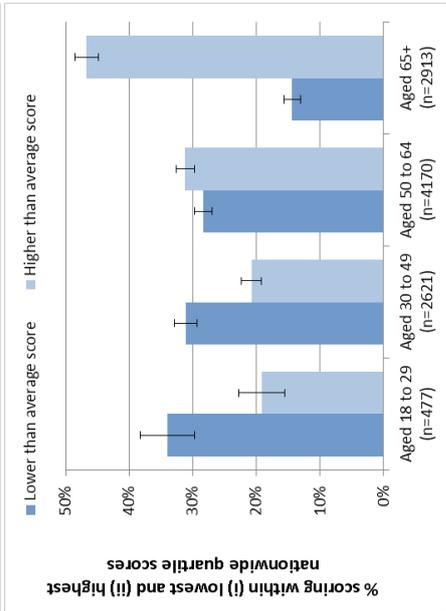
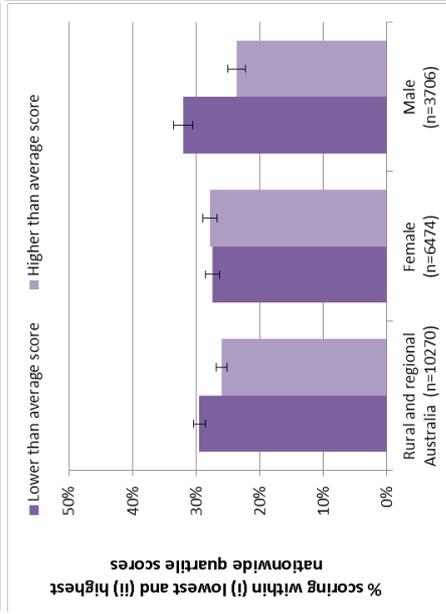
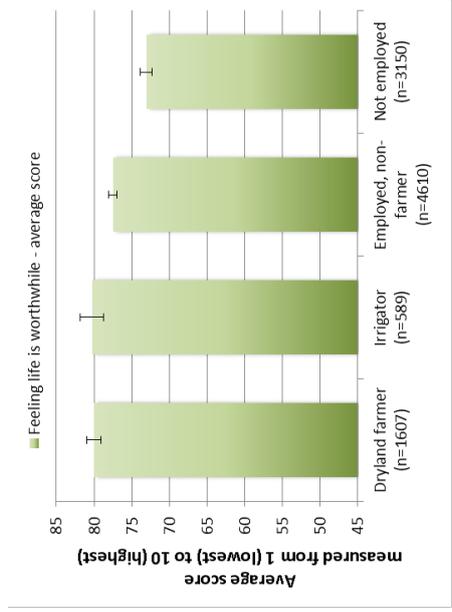
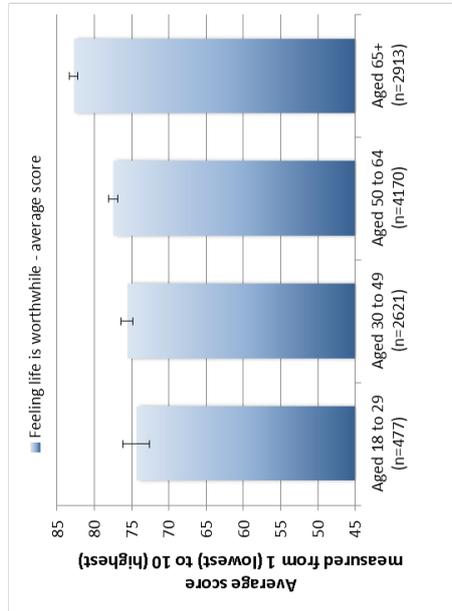
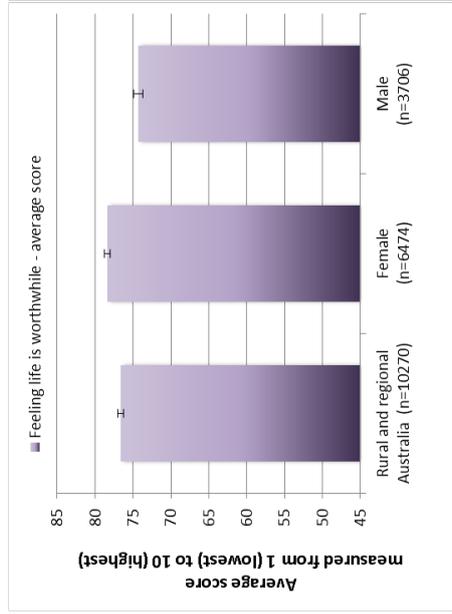


Figure 2.1w Feeling life is worthwhile, 2015, by group

Conclusions

A person's wellbeing is multifaceted and the slightly different levels of wellbeing identified when using three different measures of wellbeing reflect this. Rural and regional Australians are more likely to report feeling a strong sense of meaningfulness, in the sense that they feel as though they are doing worthwhile things with their lives, than to report feeling strongly satisfied with their lives. While a majority of rural and regional Australians felt both satisfied with their lives and that their lives were worthwhile, almost one-third reported low levels of life satisfaction, with younger people and those not in paid employment more likely to do so. Those with low life satisfaction were most likely to report low levels of satisfaction with their health, future security and what they are currently achieving in life. People living in Tasmania were more likely to report low levels of wellbeing than those in other states. As expected, wellbeing was relatively stable across most regions and groups between 2014 and 2015, with a small number of exceptions. In particular, within Western Australia, there was a decline in the average wellbeing of people living in the Mid West Gascoyne & Goldfields Esperance region, potentially reflecting declines in mining activity in that region. Women, those aged 65 and older, and farmers (both dryland and irrigating) were more likely to report high levels of wellbeing, and those who were not in employment and those aged 30 to 49 less likely to report this. Men were more likely than women to report low levels of wellbeing.

Chapter 2.2: Key points

- Communities with higher wellbeing (liveability) are those which successfully support high quality of life for all their residents
- Four measures of overall community wellbeing were included in the 2015 Regional Wellbeing Survey: (i) the Community Wellbeing Index (CWI), which asked respondents to rate how their community performs in supporting their quality of life into the future; (ii) changes in local liveability, where survey participants rated whether their community's liveability, friendliness, economy and landscape were getting better or worse; (iii) community reputation, in which participants were asked if they would recommend their community to others as a place to live, and (iv) migration intentions, in which participants were asked if they were considering migrating to live in a new community
- 73% of rural and regional Australians felt positively about their community's wellbeing when measuring using the CWI
- Similar to previous years, residents living in Queensland, and people aged under 30, had lower CWI scores compared to other regions and groups; these groups also reported poorer outcomes when asked about how liveability was changing, community reputation and migration intention
- Just over half of rural and regional Australians felt that their community's friendliness (55%), liveability (51%) and local landscape and surrounds (56%) were changing for the better; only 18-23% felt each of these changing for the worse
- Queensland residents and dryland farmers (and, to a lesser extent, irrigators) were more likely than other rural and regional Australians to feel the liveability, friendliness and local landscape in their local community was declining, and Tasmanians most likely to feel these were improving
- Forty two per cent of rural and regional Australians felt their economy was worsening, particularly those living in Queensland and Western Australia and dryland farmers; only 31% felt that local economic conditions were improving
- Almost three quarters of rural and regional Australians (73%) would recommend their community to others as a good place to live, particularly Victorians (77%) and residents of New South Wales (78%); Queenslanders were significantly less likely to be willing to recommend their community to others (63%), as were people aged under 30 (64%)
- Across rural and regional Australia, 7.5% of people believed they likely or very likely to shift to a new community in the next 12 months: those most likely to were people aged under 30, men, and those living in Western Australia and New South Wales, while people aged 65 and older, women, irrigators, and those living in Tasmania were least likely to be planning to shift to a new community
- Just over two thirds (38%) of rural and regional Australians had considered shifting to a new community at some point within the past three years, but decided not to: the types of people who had considered shifting were very similar to those who reported intending to migrate in the next 12 months.

2.2 Wellbeing of communities

Each year, the Regional Wellbeing Survey asks participants to assess multiple aspects of the wellbeing of their community, which means they are asked to indicate how well they feel their community supports a high quality of life for its residents. A community with high liveability is generally considered more likely to be one that successfully maintains and grows its population, and which supports healthy and happy residents. These assessments provide an annual picture of how people living in different places across rural and regional Australia are experiencing their communities, and contribute to discussions about how best to support quality of life in rural and regional communities.

We define a healthy, or highly 'liveable' community, as one in which:

... all systems function as they should, and work together to make the community function well ... a healthy community is one in which all citizens can be assured of a decent quality of life – economically, physically, environmentally, socially, and politically. (KU Work Group for Community Health and Development 2014)¹⁴

The idea of 'liveability' is often used to frame discussions about healthy communities. We use the term in this report based on the understanding that the concept of liveability goes well beyond physical measures, such as quality of housing, to also include dimensions of community conditions such as the quality of governance, equality of opportunity, and aesthetic qualities of local landscape, to name a few. Characteristics of a community with high liveability (wellbeing) will typically include a healthy environment (natural and built); healthy and stable governance with opportunities for participation; adequate access to food, water, shelter, education and learning opportunities, health services, cultural and social opportunities; and a diverse economy that provides livelihood opportunities (Norris and Pittman 2000). Which of these is most important is debated, but all are recognised as key elements and necessary conditions for community to consistently provide a high quality of life its residents.

What did we measure and why?

Four key measures were used to examine community wellbeing:

1. The Community Wellbeing Index: measured as part of the Regional Wellbeing Survey since its inception in 2013, this examines the overall views of residents about their community
2. Changes in local liveability: These measures identify how residents feel their community is changing in an overall sense, and whether local liveability is getting better or worse
3. Community reputation: Whether a person would recommend their community to others as a good place to live
4. Migration intentions: Whether a person is either intending to shift away from their community in the near future, or has considered it in recent times.

The way each of these four dimensions of community wellbeing was measured is described below.

¹⁴ This reference is available online at <http://ctb.ku.edu/> (the cited text was accessed on May 12, 2014). More about the Community Tool Box this quote was sourced from can be found in Fawcett et al. (2000).

Community Wellbeing Index - measurement

Community wellbeing was measured using the Community Wellbeing Index (CWI), first used in the 2013 Regional Wellbeing Survey (Schirmer and Berry 2014). This index is constructed using responses to the following items, each of which is measured on a 7-point scale from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (7). A mean score is then calculated to provide the CWI score:

- *My community is a great place to live*
- *This community copes pretty well when faced with challenges*
- *I feel proud to live in this community*
- *This community has a bright future*
- *There's good community spirit around here.*

These statements collectively provide a measure of how attached and positive residents feel about living in their community, and about the future of that community. They measure the overall 'sense of community' a person feels (Pretty et al. 2007). In both the 2013 and 2014 surveys, statistical analysis confirmed that these five items measure different facets of a shared underlying concept of community wellbeing.

Changes in local liveability - measurement

In addition to measuring overall levels of community wellbeing/liveability, from 2015 the Regional Wellbeing Survey included questions asking participants to evaluate whether they felt that there was positive or negative change happening in their community. Specifically, they were asked to rate whether any of the following four areas were getting worse or better, on a 7-point scale from 'getting worse' (1) to 'getting better' (7):

- *The liveability of this community is...*
- *The friendliness of this community is...*
- *The local economy is...*
- *The local landscape and surrounds in this community are...*

No specific timeframe was given in the question, with participants asked to rate their current feeling about whether their community was changing for the better or worse.

Community reputation – measurement

In 2015, a new measure of community wellbeing was included in the Regional Wellbeing Survey which focused on the idea of community reputation. Participants were asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed, on a 7-point scale from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (7), with the following statement:

- *I would recommend my community to others as a good place to live*

Instead of asking a person to directly rate different aspects of their community, it asks whether they would advise others to come and live in their community.

Migration intentions – measurement

Each year, the Regional Wellbeing Survey asks participants:

- How likely they are to shift to a new community in the next 12 months, on a 7 point scale from 'very unlikely' to 'very likely'

- Whether they have considered shifting to a new community in the last 3 years, but not actually shifted (respondents can answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’).

Responses to these items provide a useful picture of community wellbeing: communities in which a large proportion of the population are intending to shift are likely to be those in which some aspects of liveability are low.

Community Wellbeing Index

The Community Wellbeing Index has been included in the Regional Wellbeing Survey since 2013, and change over time in the index is shown in Figure 2.2a. Between 2014 and 2015, the CWI fell slightly across rural and regional Australia. This fall was not evenly distributed, as analyses by region help demonstrate. Overall, across Australia the CWI had an average score of 5.4 in 2015 out of a possible 1 to 7, indicating that 73% of people rated their community as having positive wellbeing.

Community Wellbeing Index by region

This national fall in the CWI between 2014 and 2015 reflected in particular a decline in the states of Queensland and Western Australia. Overall, those living in Queensland had lower confidence in their community’s wellbeing, and those in Western Australia slightly lower confidence compared to those in other states (Figure 2.2b). When the proportion of people reporting scores that were lower and higher than the national average were examined¹⁵, residents of Queensland were much more likely to have low CWI scores than residents of any other state. When examined by region (Figure 2.2c), ratings of community wellbeing were lower than the national average in all parts of Queensland except the Darling Downs & South West region; in two regions of NSW (Orana & Far West; Hunter Illawarra & Central Coast), and two regions of South Australia (Western & Northern SA; Murraylands & Riverland).

In addition, there were some regions in which, despite the region overall having a typical CWI score, there were large differences in views of residents about this issue (Figures 2.2d and 2.2e). For example in the Murray and Central West regions of New South Wales a larger than usual proportion of residents had a low CWI score, but others living in these regions had relatively high scores. In these regions there is a substantial group of people who have low confidence in their community’s wellbeing, even though the average CWI score for the whole community may be close to average. Conversely, in the Southern Inland region of NSW, many people rated their community wellbeing higher than average, suggesting that despite the overall ‘typical’ rating, a significant proportion of residents felt that their community had very high levels of liveability. In each of these regions, a different set of factors is likely to be contributing to poorer or higher than average community wellbeing for some groups of people. Changes in the CWI between 2014 and 2015 were compared for regions in which there was adequate sample size in both years (Figure 2.2f). Average CWI scores declined significantly in three regions: the Mid West Gascoyne & Goldfields Esperance (WA), Orana & Far West (NSW), and the Riverina (NSW). Average CWI scores increased significantly in three regions: the Barossa & Adelaide Metropolitan (SA), Far South Coast (NSW), and Melbourne East (Vic).

¹⁵ Lower than average scores were defined as those falling within the bottom quartile of the nationwide rural and regional average (scores of 4.81 or below out of a possible 7), and higher than average scores were defined as those falling in the top quartile (scores of 6.19 or above out of a possible 7).

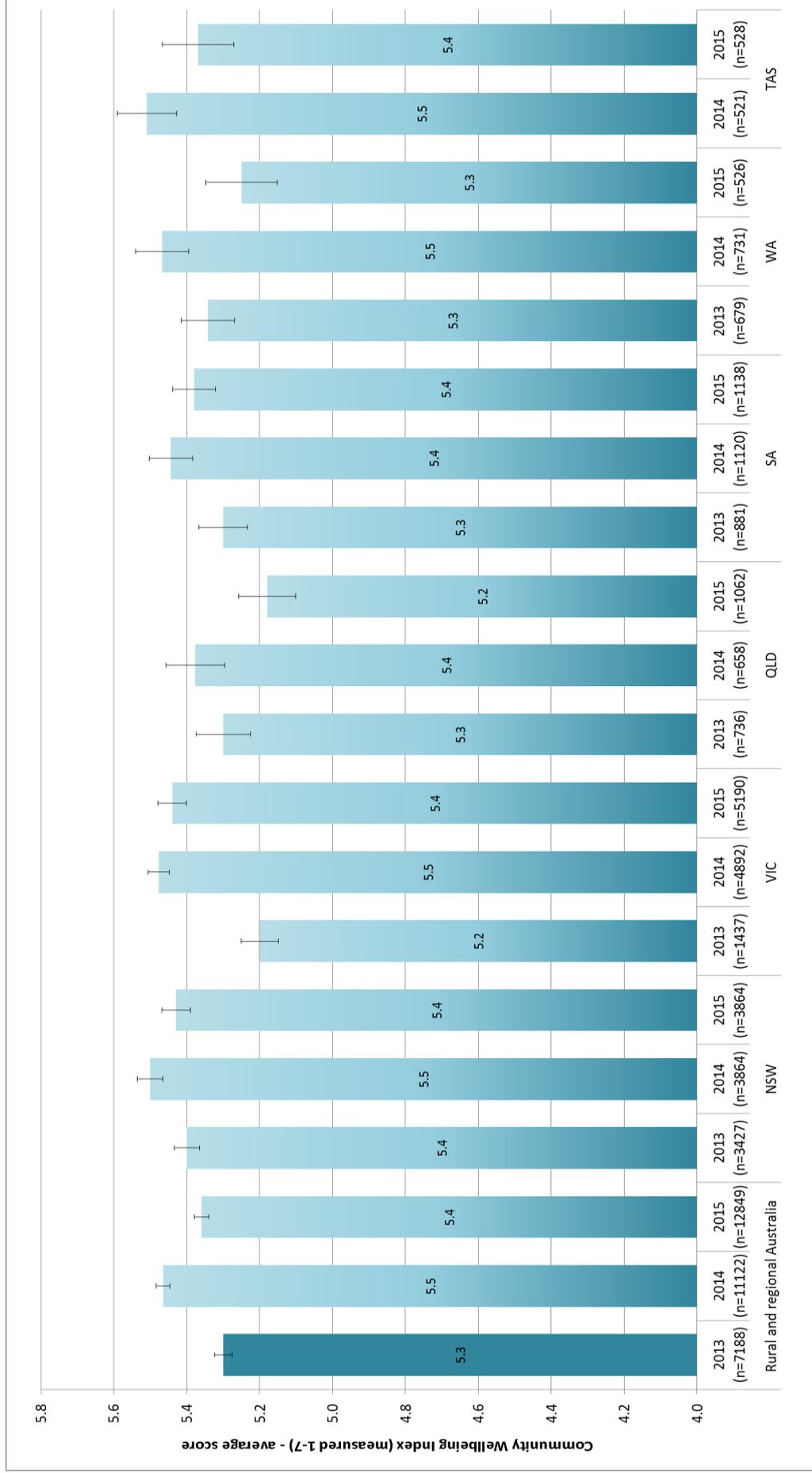


Figure 2.2a Community Wellbeing Index, 2013 to 2015, by state

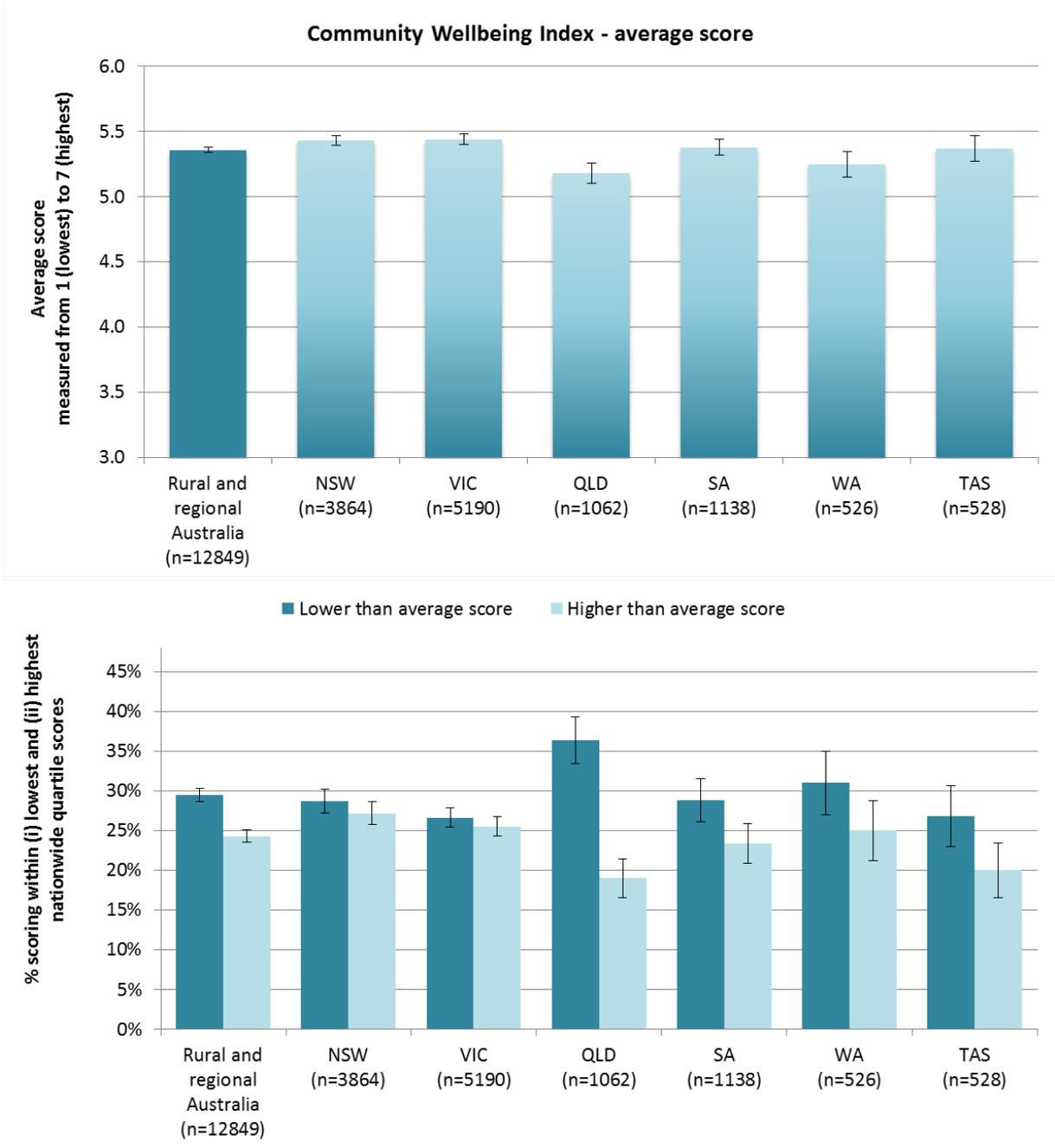


Figure 2.2b Community Wellbeing Index, 2015, by state

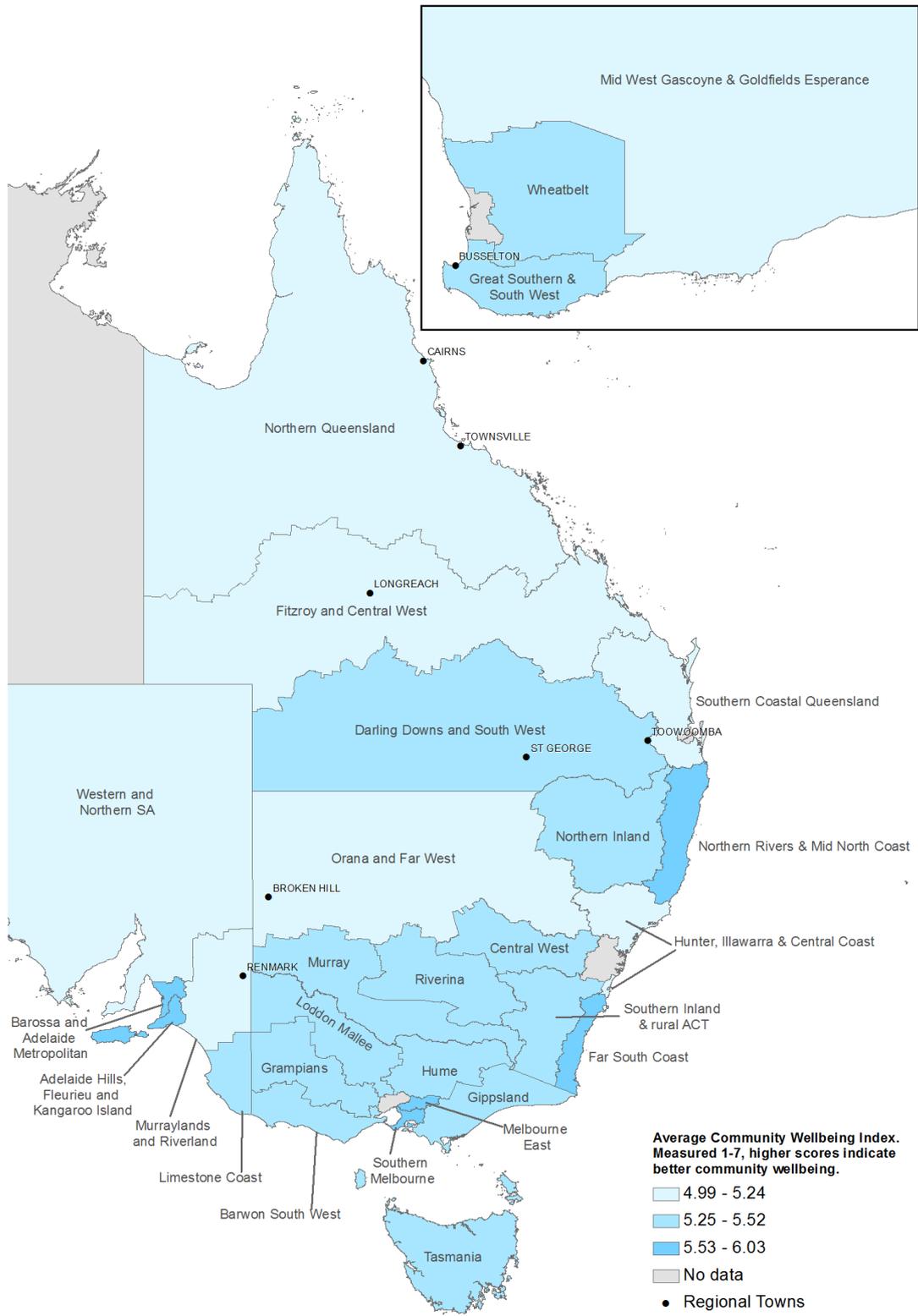


Figure 2.2c Community Wellbeing Index, 2015, by region

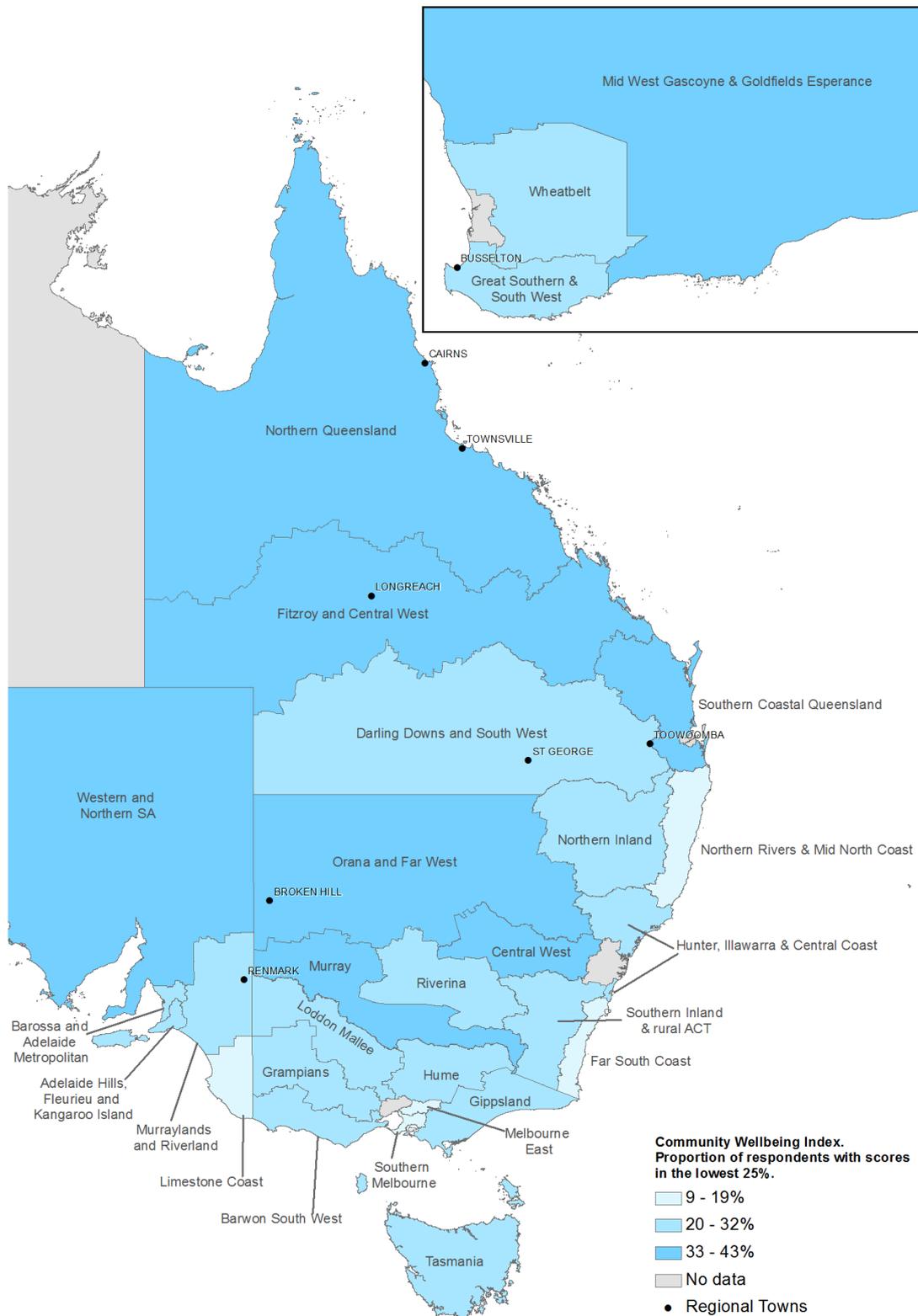


Figure 2.2d Community Wellbeing Index, 2015, proportion of population reporting lower than average scores¹⁶

¹⁶ Defined as those with a score lower than the 25th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians

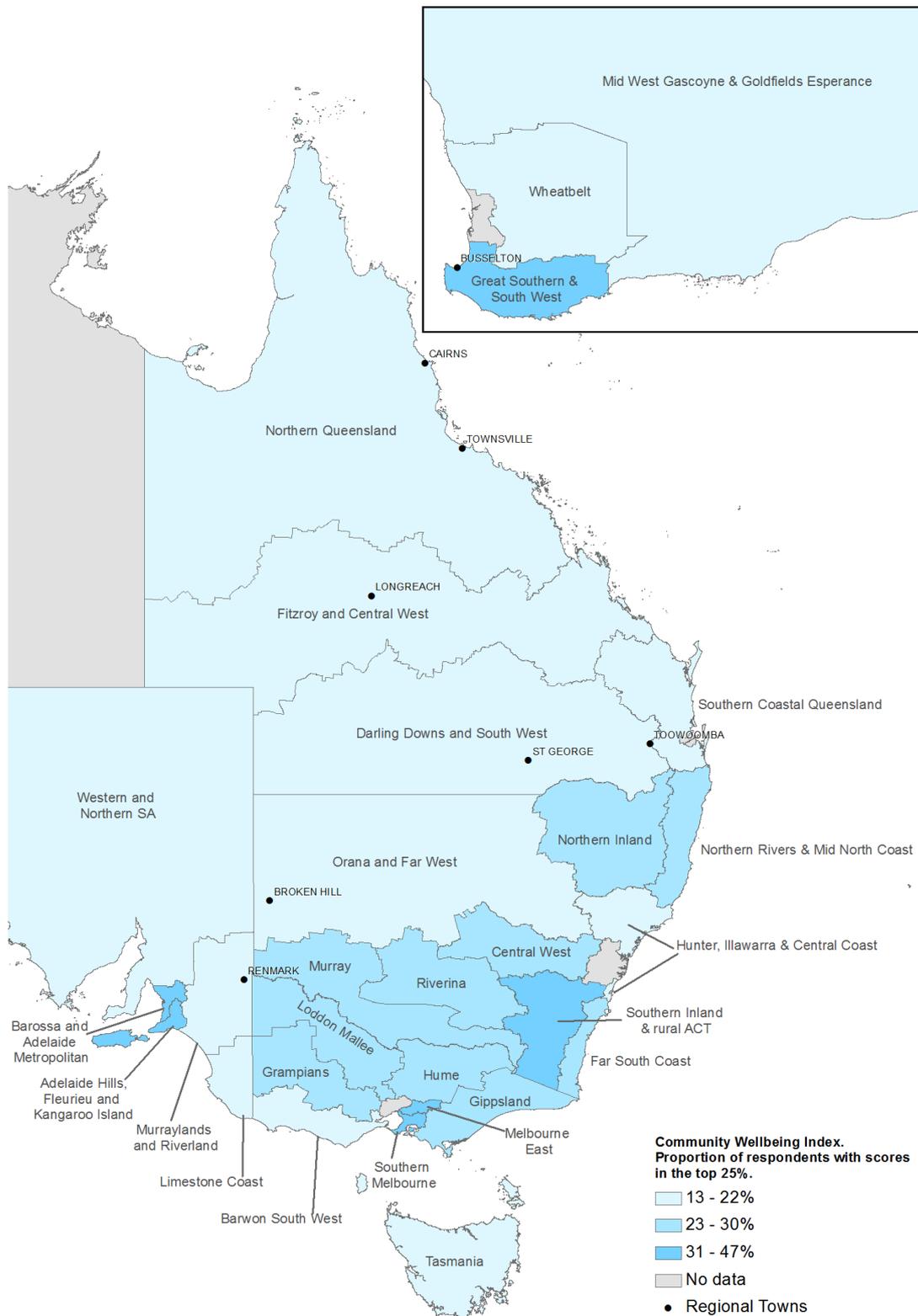


Figure 2.2e Community Wellbeing Index, 2015, proportion of population reporting higher than average scores¹⁷

¹⁷ Defined as those with a score higher than the 75th percentile score for all rural and regional Australians

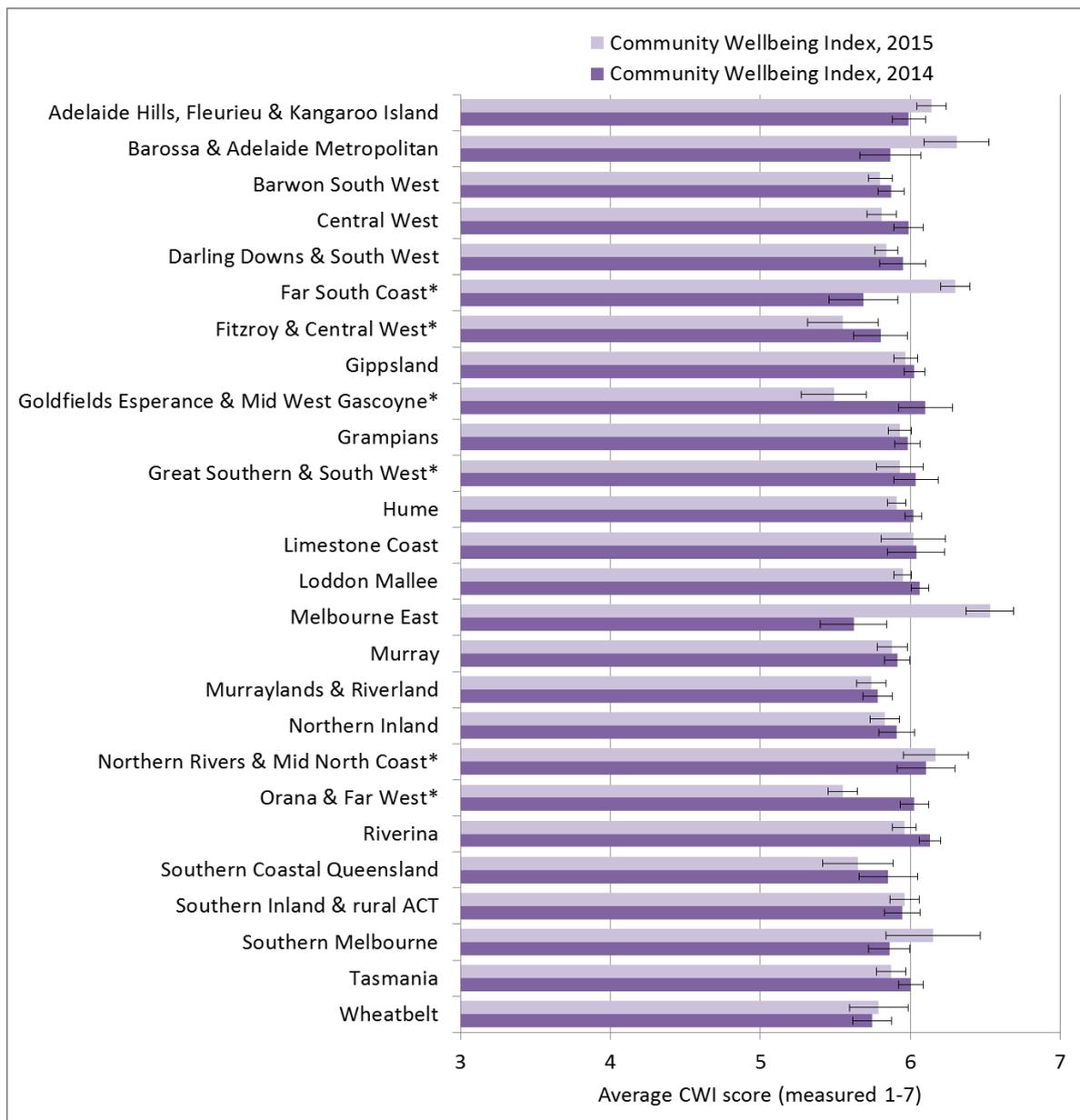


Figure 2.2f Changes in the CWI, 2014 to 2015, by region¹⁸

¹⁸ A star (*) next to the name of a region indicates that the boundaries of this region differed in 2014 and 2015, and the region is reported using the 2015 region name. See the footnote to Figure 2.1h for further details of how to interpret this figure.

Community Wellbeing Index for different groups

Even in a community with high liveability, not everyone will have equal access to all of the resources that make it liveable. For example, not everyone will be able to access community organisations, services and infrastructure, or to enjoy some of the things that the community has to provide. Factors such as a lack of financial resources, limited social connections, and being socially marginalised, amongst others, can prevent some residents from being able to capitalise on the resources available to others in their community. This means that people who live in the same place can often experience it very differently depending on their location, their socio-economic status, and whether they feel welcome. Figure 2.2g compares the experiences of different types of people. Similar to the 2014 Regional Wellbeing Survey, it shows that the younger a person is, the lower the community wellbeing they typically report. This is particularly the case for 18 to 29 year olds, who report much less confidence in their community's wellbeing, liveability and future when compared to those in other age groups. These results mirror the findings of previous Regional Wellbeing Surveys and highlight differences in the ways people of different ages experience the liveability of their rural and regional communities.

To better understand why this is the case, the 2015 RWS included some additional content that further evaluated what aspects of a community's liveability residents felt were changing for better or worse, described in the next section.

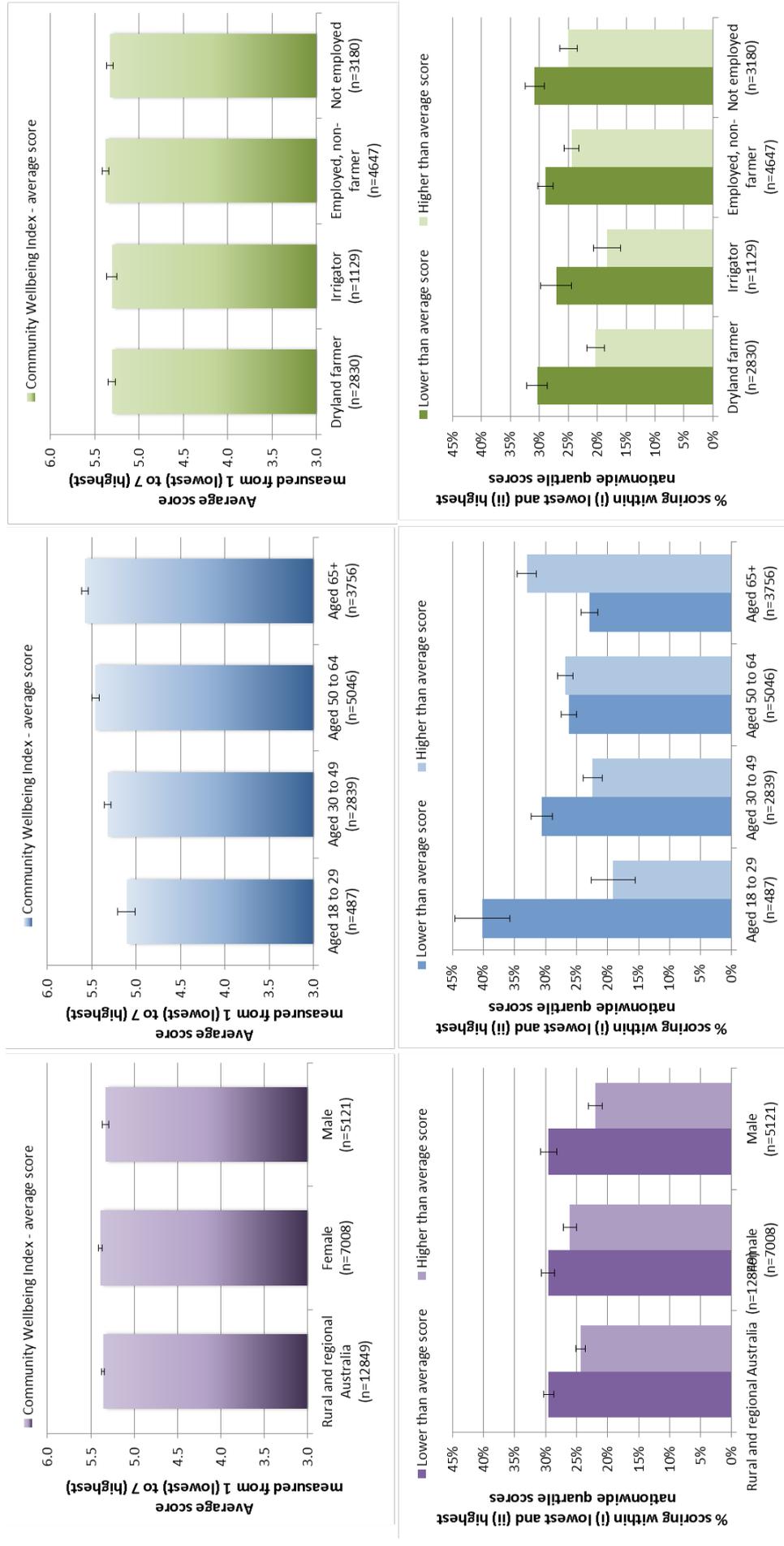


Figure 2.2g Community Wellbeing Index, 2015, by group

Changes in community liveability

In 2015, just over half of rural and regional Australians felt their community was improving in terms of liveability, friendliness and their local landscape, but only one-third felt their local economy was getting better and more than 40% felt that local economic conditions were worsening. As shown in Figure 2.2h, rural and regional Australians were much more likely to report that liveability was getting better (51%) than getting worse (23%). More than half felt that friendliness was growing in their local community (55%) and that the local landscape and surrounds were improving (56%). Only one in five felt either of these aspects of their community was declining. However, it was a different picture when views about the economy were examined: 42% felt their local economy was getting worse, and only 31% felt that it was improving. Each of the four aspects of community change shown in Figure 2.2h is examined in more detail in the following sections.

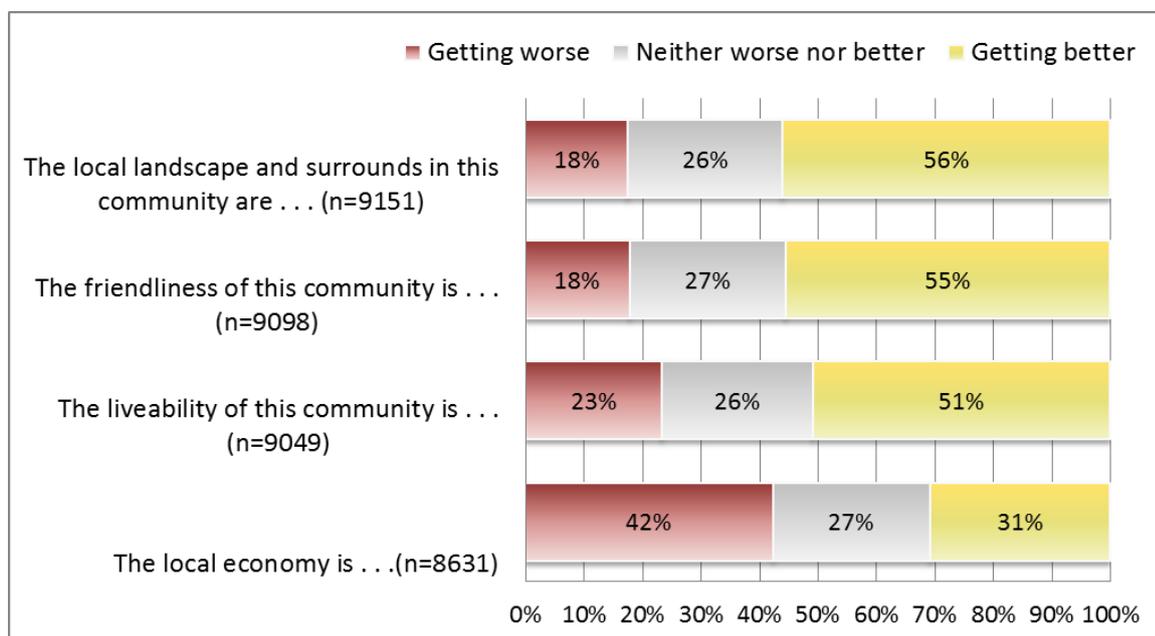


Figure 2.2h Changes in community liveability, 2015, rural and regional Australia

Liveability

As shown in Figure 2.2i, people living in Queensland were much more likely than those in other states to feel that the liveability of their local community was getting worse, and less likely to feel it was getting better. Tasmanians, and to a lesser extent Victorians, were more likely than those in other parts of rural and regional Australia to report that liveability was improving. Examination of views reported by people living in different regions shows that Queenslanders in all regions except Southern Coastal Queensland were amongst the most likely to feel liveability was worsening. In New South Wales there was large variability between regions, with those living in northern inland regions more likely to report worsening liveability, and those in the south coast more likely to report improving liveability. In South Australia, liveability was rated as changing for the worse by many residents of the Limestone Coast, Murraylands & Riverland, and Western & Northern SA, but people living in other regions were more likely to be rate it as getting better (Figure 2.2j).

When different groups were compared (Figure 2.2k), men and women reported almost identical views. Those aged 65 and older were more likely than younger people to report that liveability of their community was improving. Farmers (both dryland and irrigating farmers) were less likely to report liveability was improving than non-farmers: only 40% of farmers reported that liveability was getting better, compared to 51% of rural and regional Australians.

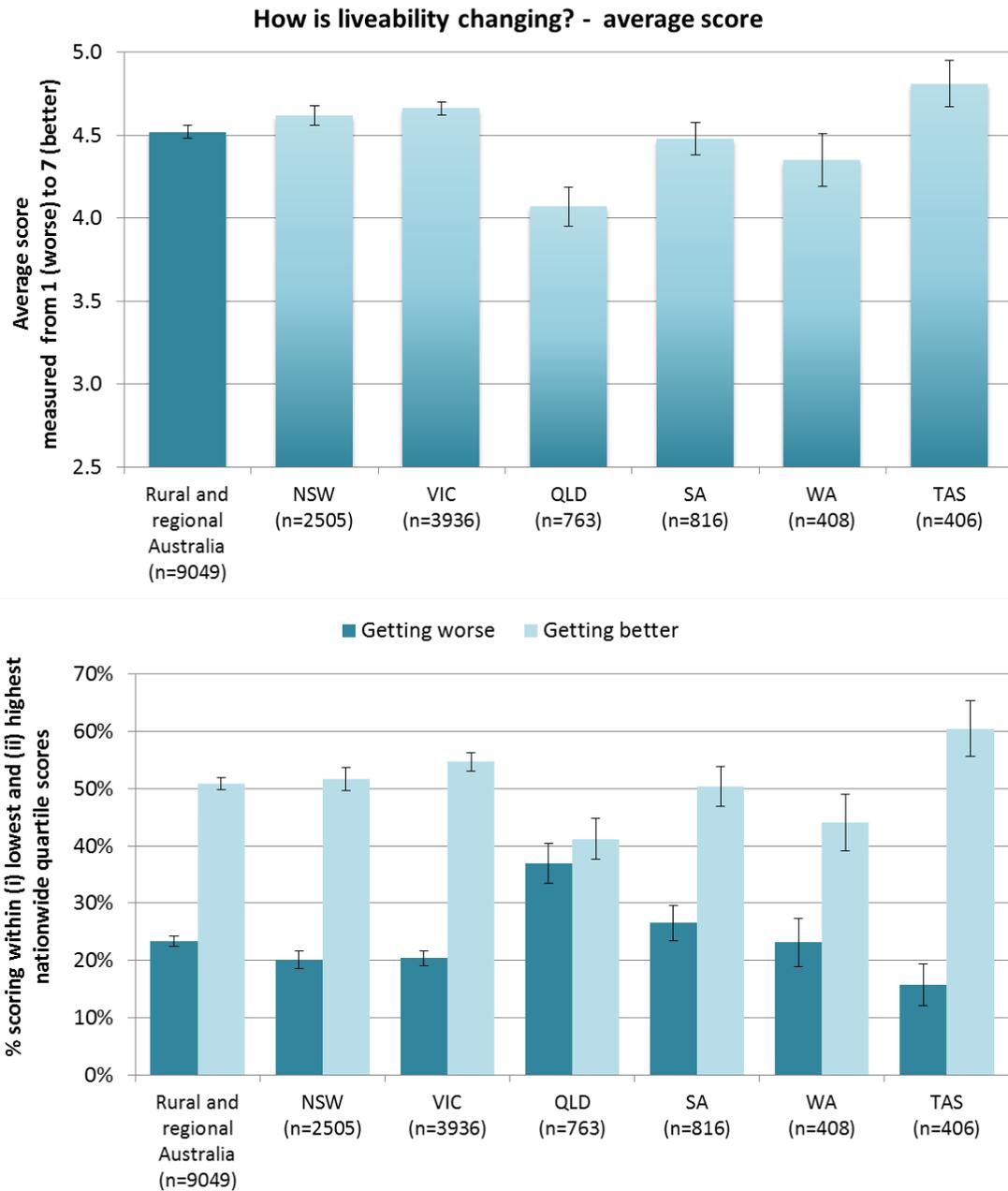


Figure 2.2i Changes in liveability of local communities, by state

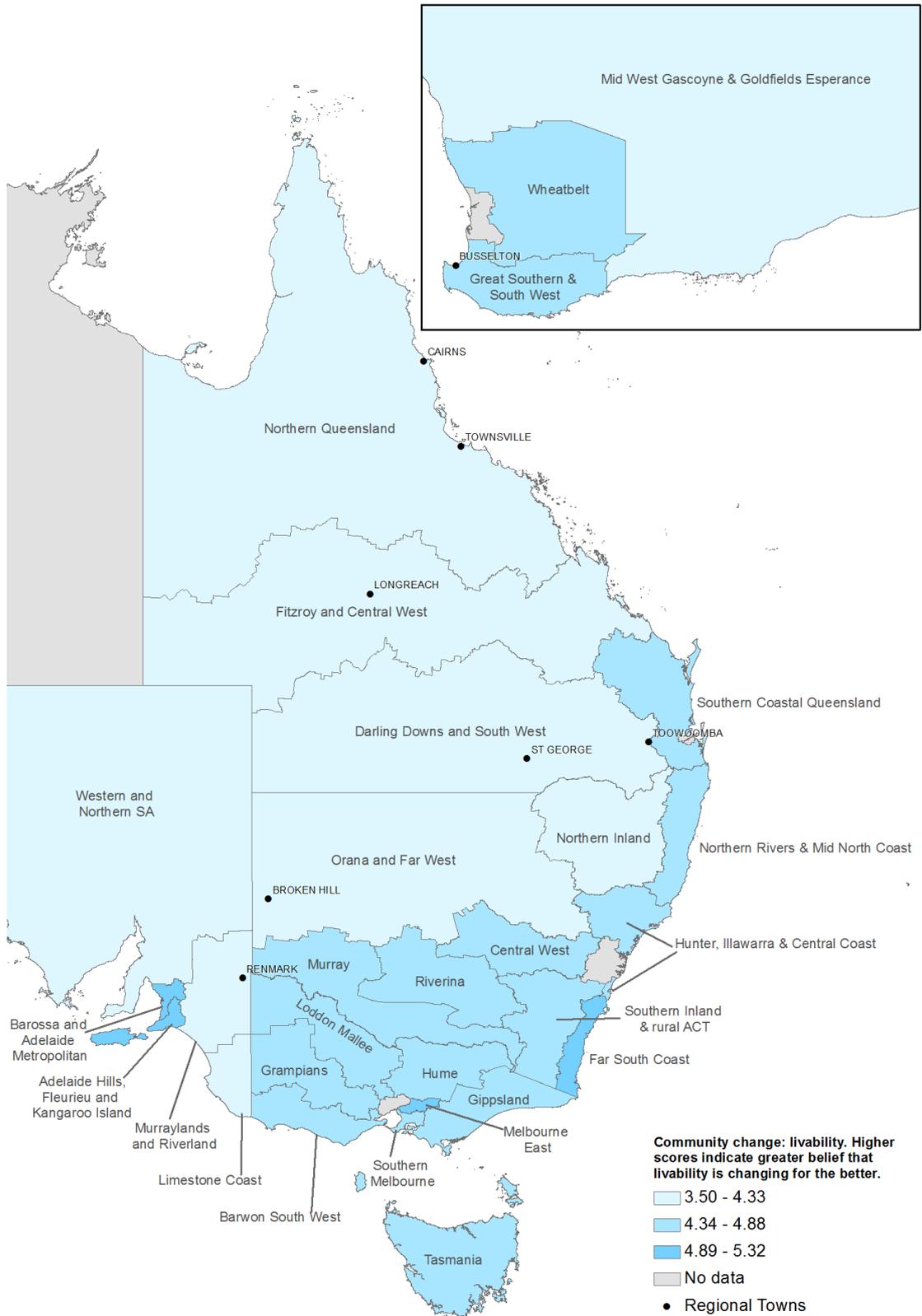


Figure 2.2j Changes in liveability of local communities, by region

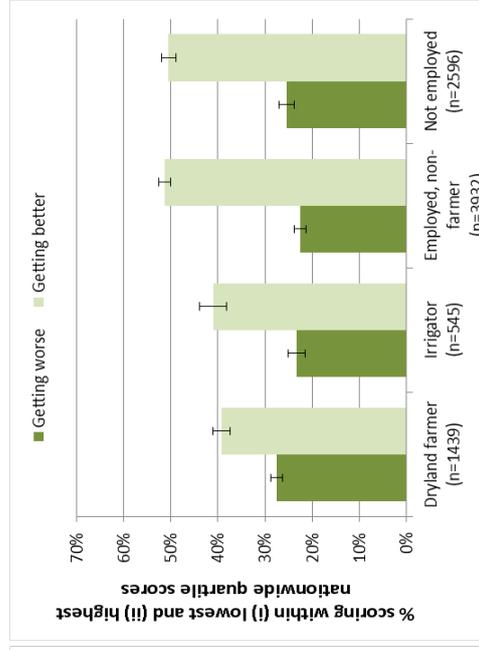
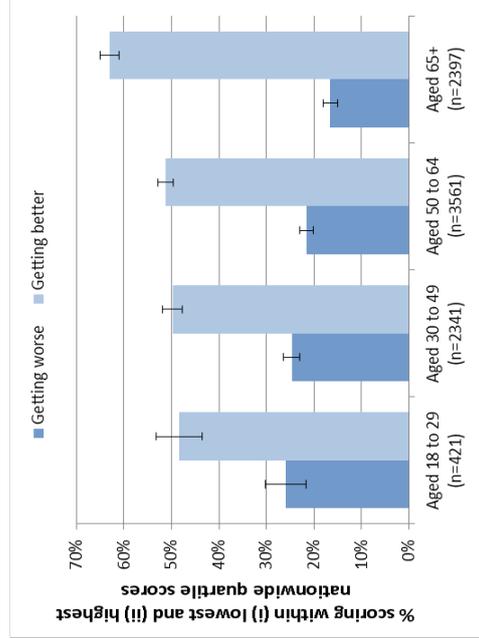
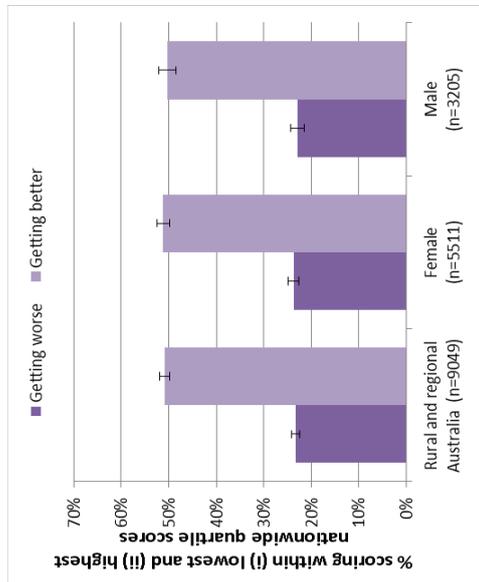
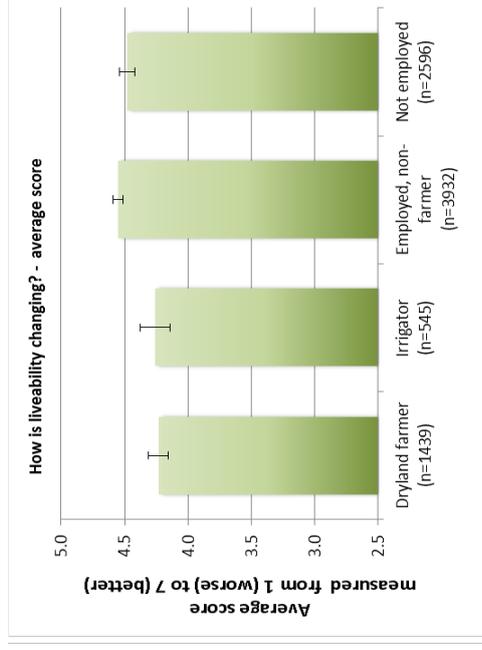
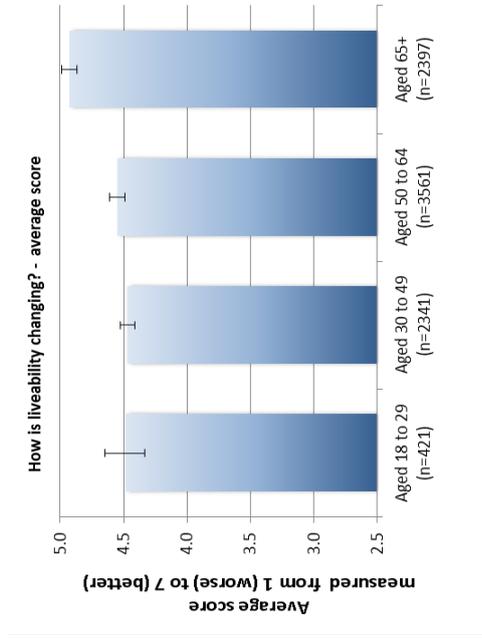
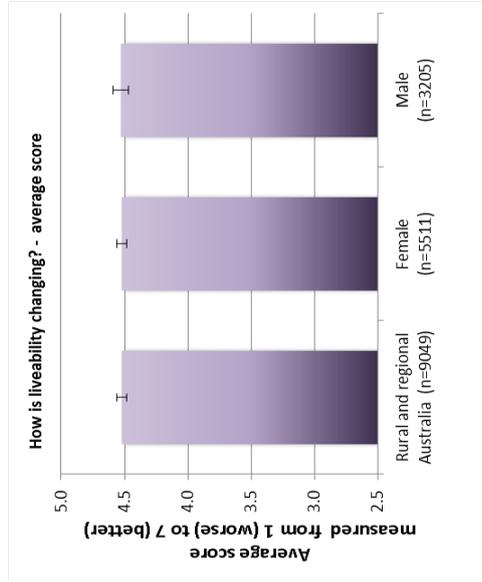


Figure 2.2.k Changes in liveability of local communities, by group

Friendliness

Overall, people living in Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania were more likely to report that friendliness was getting better in their communities. People living in Queensland and Western Australia were more likely than those in other states to feel that local friendliness was declining, and less likely to feel friendliness was staying the same or improving (Figure 2.2l). Residents of some other regions were also more likely to feel friendliness was declining, particularly the Murraylands & Riverland (SA), Limestone Coast (SA), Barwon South West (Vic), and Orana & Far West (NSW) regions. People living on the eastern and southern outskirts of Melbourne, in the Murray region of NSW, and in northern and southern coastal regions of NSW were most likely to report increasing levels of friendliness (Figure 2.2m). Women were slightly more likely than men to feel their community was becoming more friendly (Figure 2.2n). There were much larger differences between people of different ages with those aged under 30 being most likely to report friendliness was declining in their community, and those aged 65 and older most likely to report friendliness was increasing. Farmers were less likely to report that friendliness was improving than non-farmers, although the differences between farmers and non-farmers were relatively small.

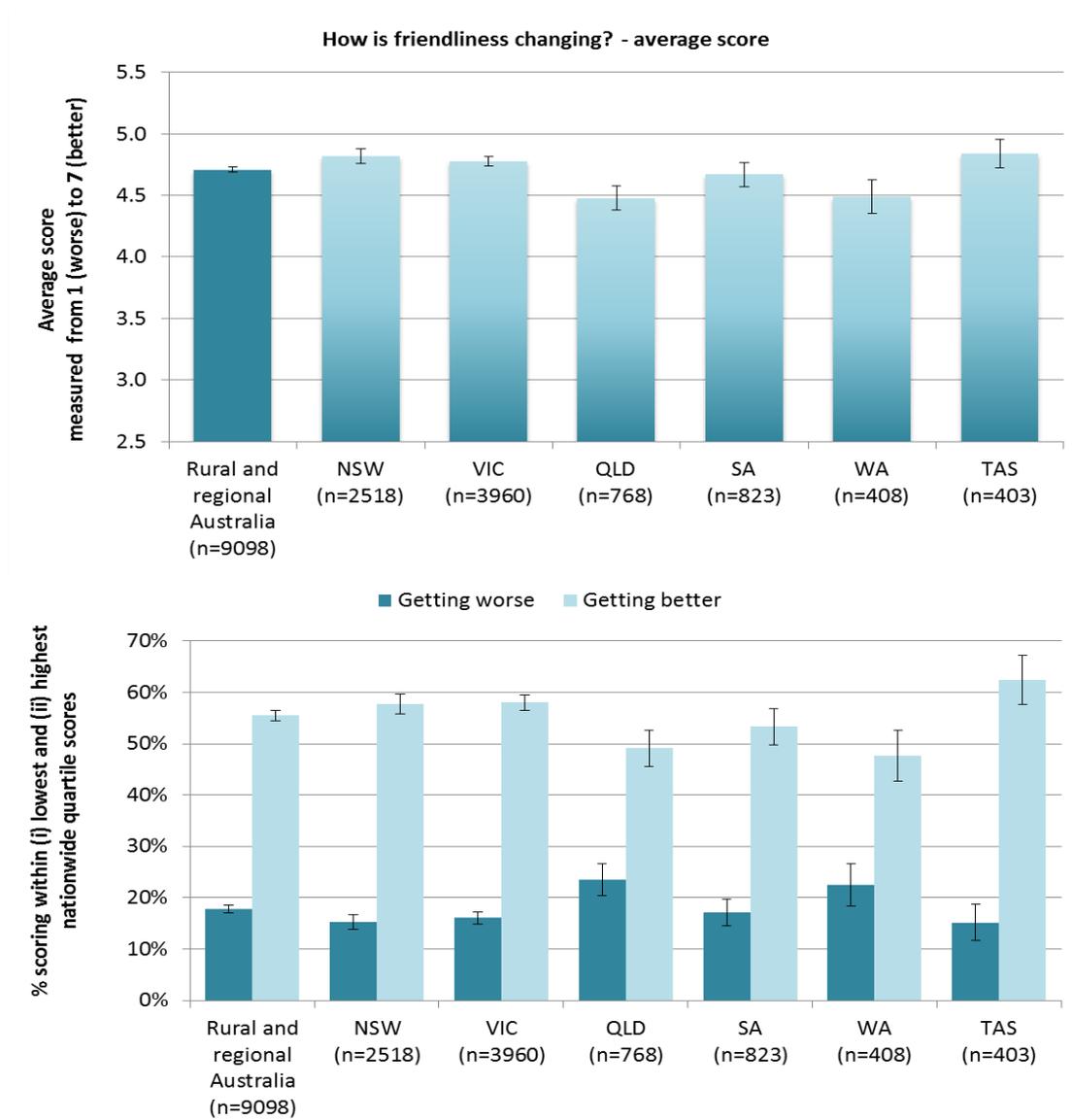


Figure 2.2l Changes in friendliness of local communities, by state

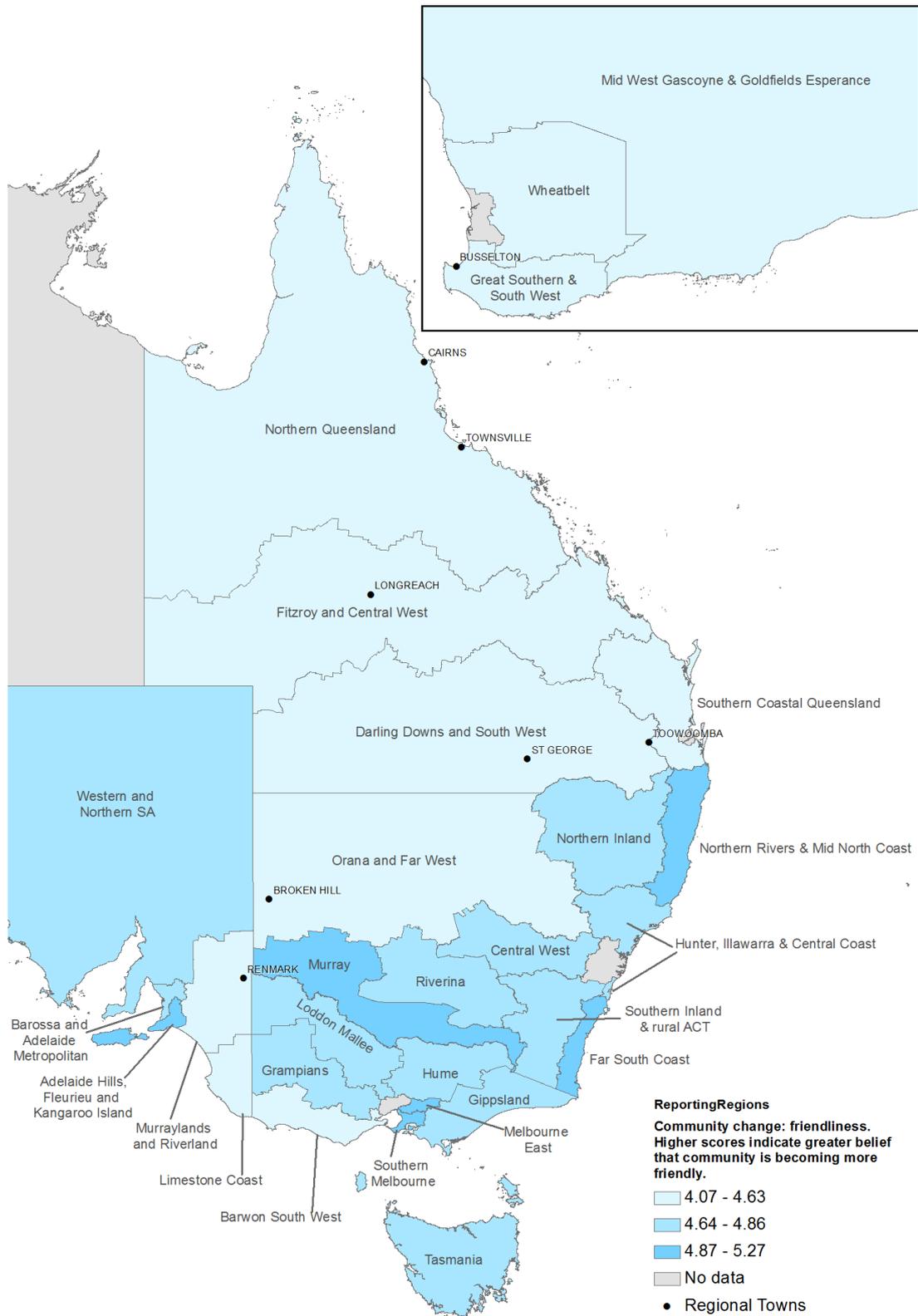


Figure 2.2m Changes in friendliness of local communities, by region

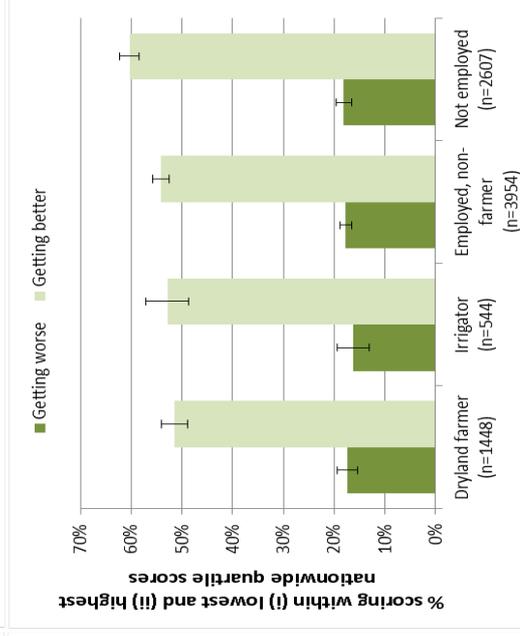
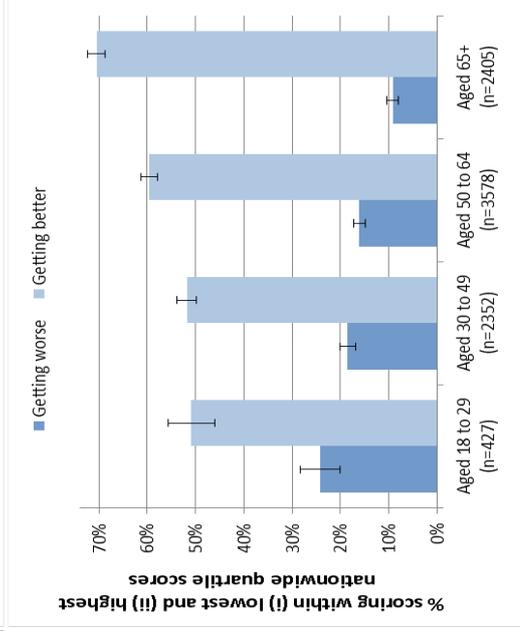
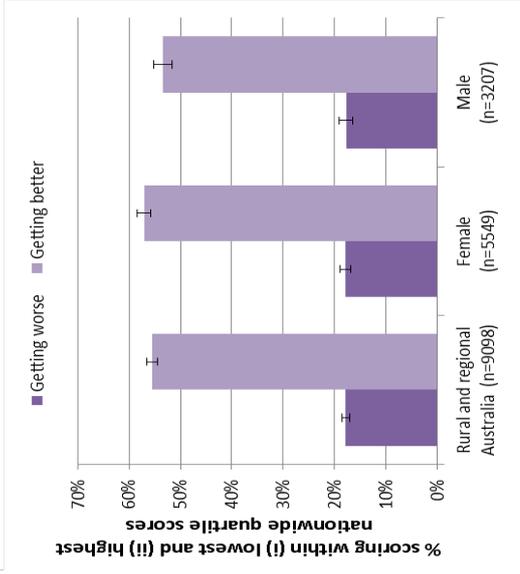
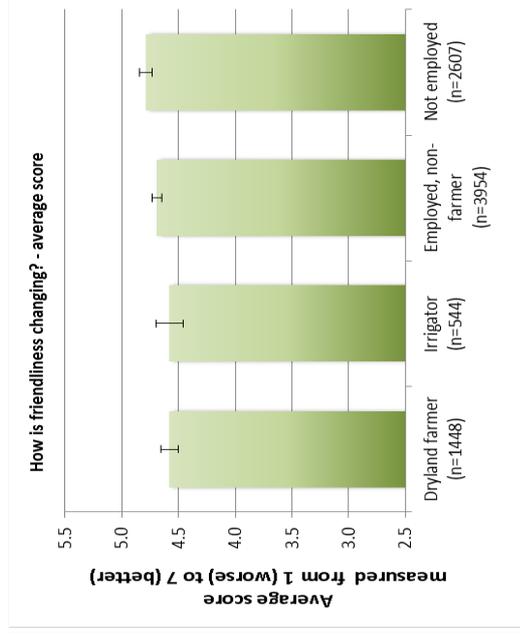
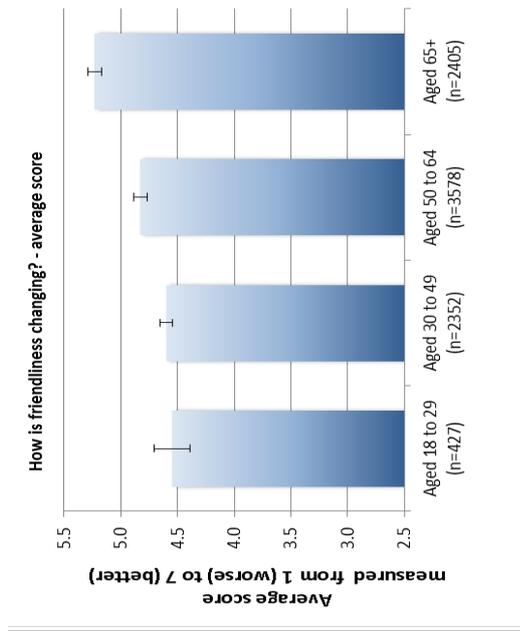
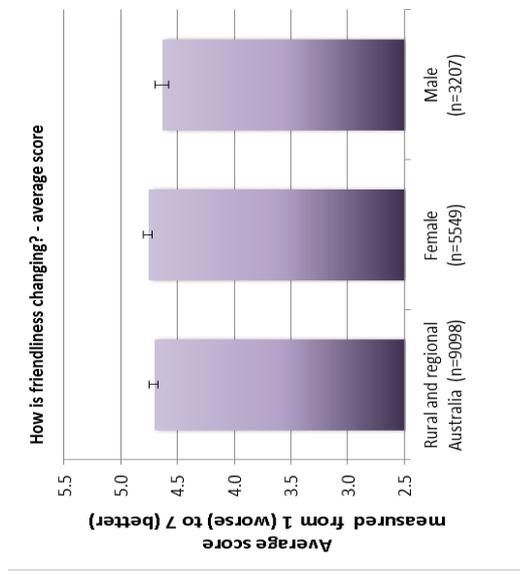


Figure 2.2n Changes in friendliness of local communities, by group

Local landscape and surrounds

As shown in Figure 2.2o, people living in Queensland, and to a lesser extent Western Australia, were less likely than those in other states to feel that their local landscape and surrounds were getting better, and much more likely to feel they were getting worse. Tasmanians were particularly likely to feel their local landscape and surrounds were getting better. When different regions were examined (Figure 2.2p) people living in all parts of Queensland except Southern Coastal Queensland were amongst the most likely to feel their local landscape and surrounds were getting worse. In Western Australia those living in regions other than the Great Southern & South West region were also likely to feel their local landscape was declining. In New South Wales there was large variability between regions with those living in the Orana & Far West, and in the Hunter Illawarra & Central Coast regions more likely to report declines in the local landscape while those in the Riverina, Murray and Far South Coast regions were most likely to report their local landscape was getting better. When different groups were compared (Figure 2.2q), men and women reported almost identical views. Those aged 65 and older were more likely than younger people to report that the landscape and surrounds in their community were improving. Dryland farmers were less likely than others to feel their landscape and surrounds were improving, and slightly more likely to report that they were declining.

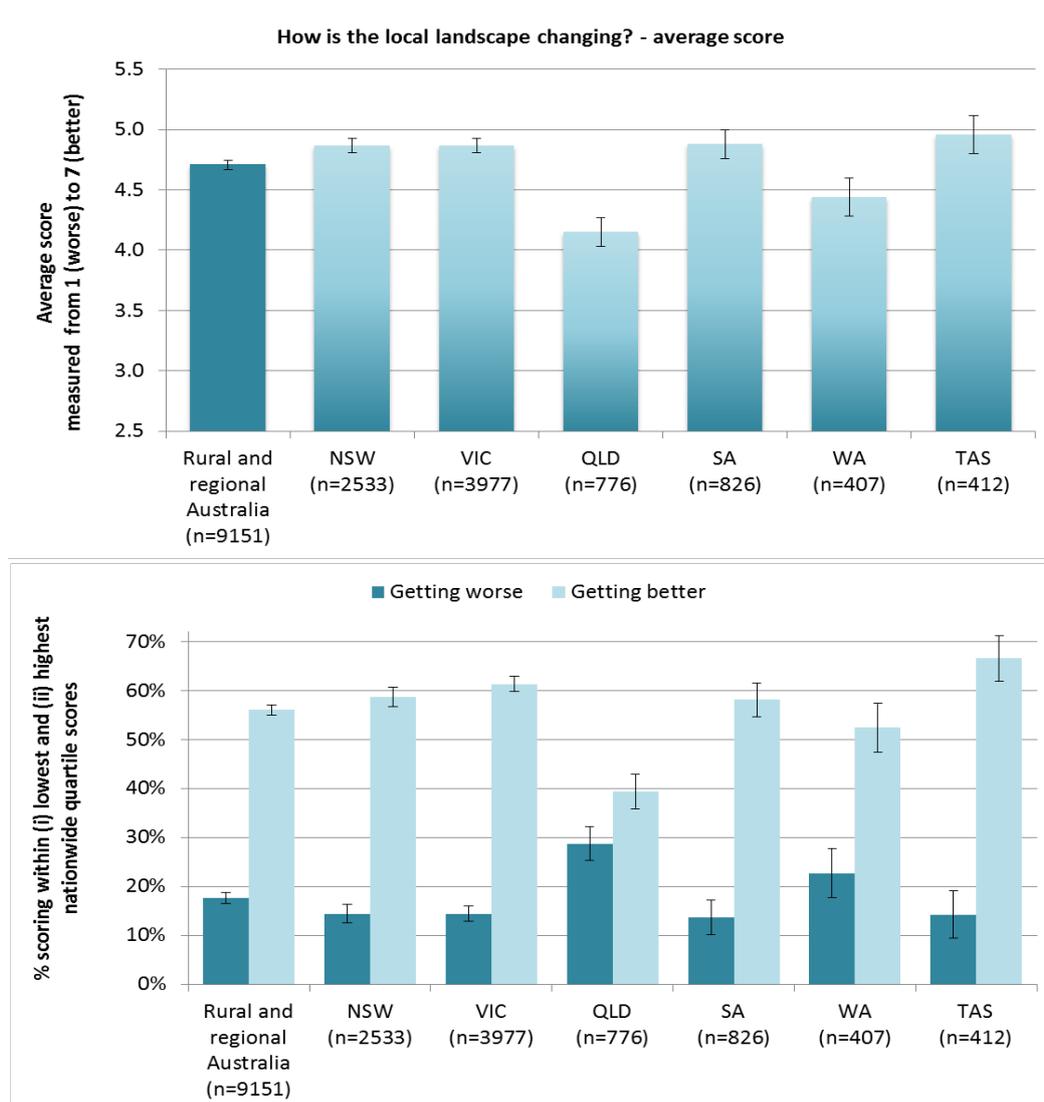


Figure 2.2o Changes in local landscape and surrounds, by state

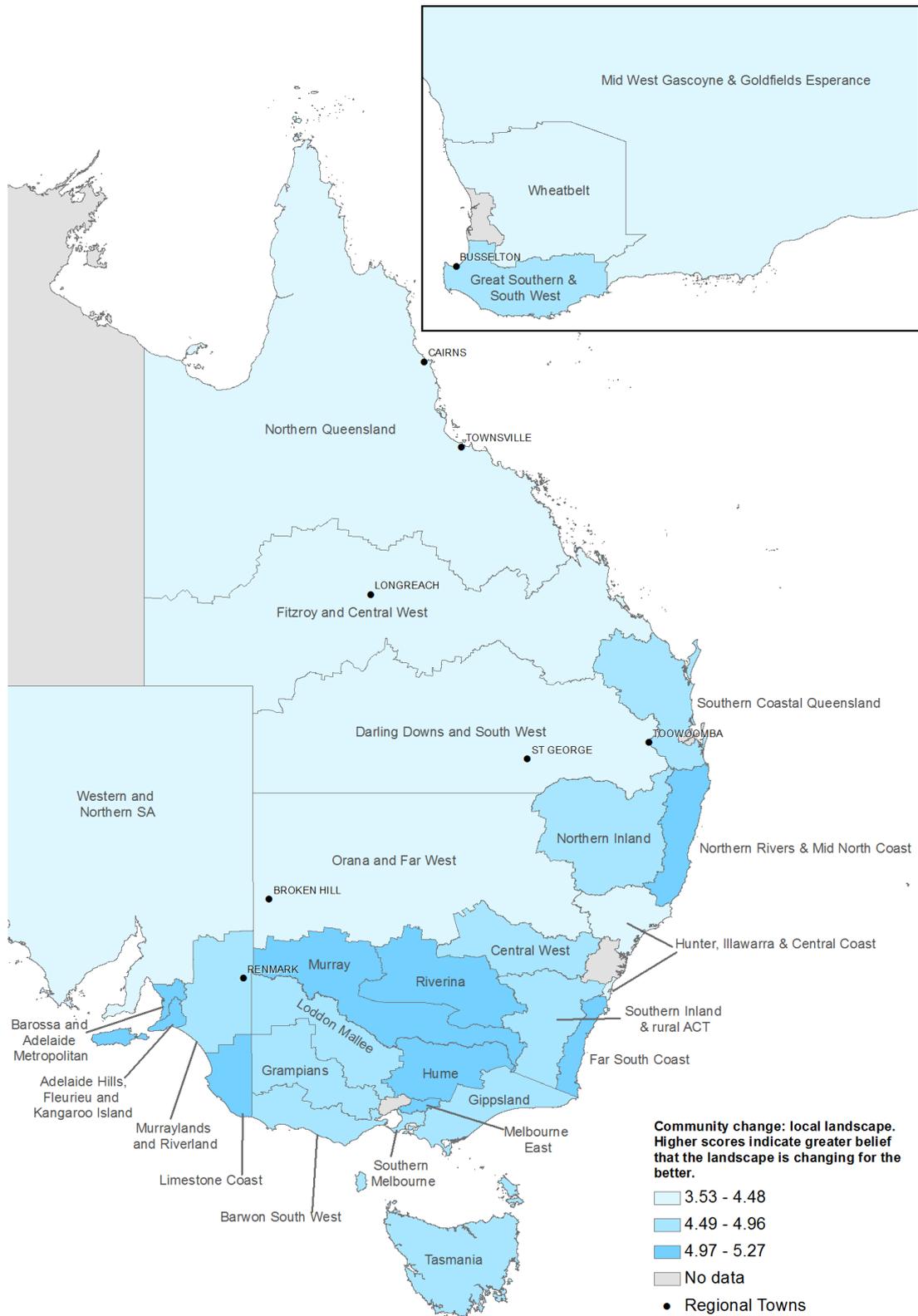


Figure 2.2p Changes in local landscape and surrounds, by region

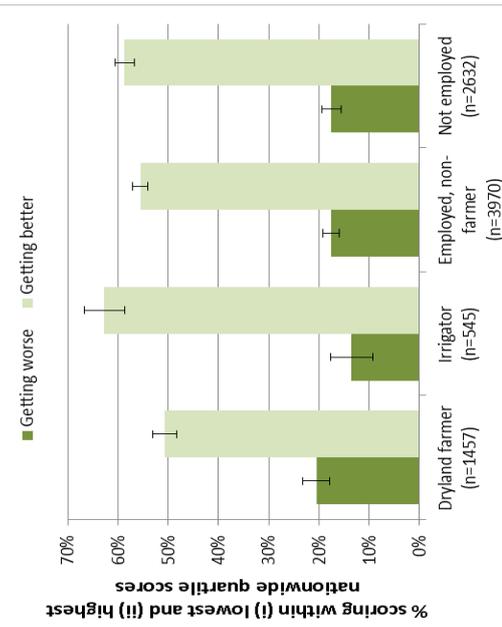
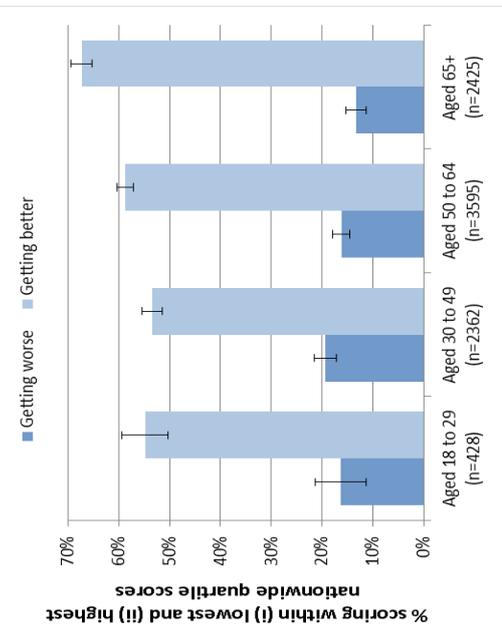
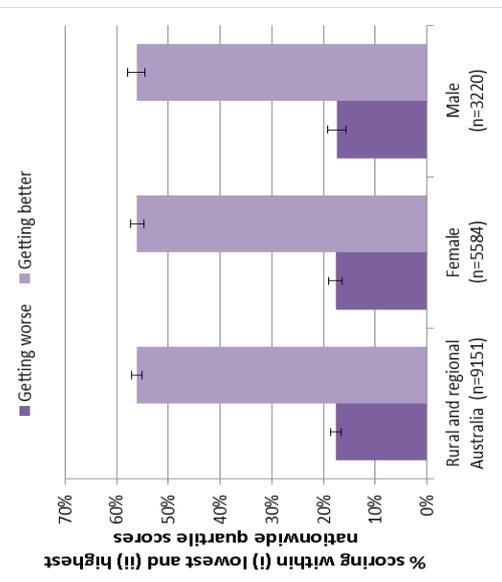
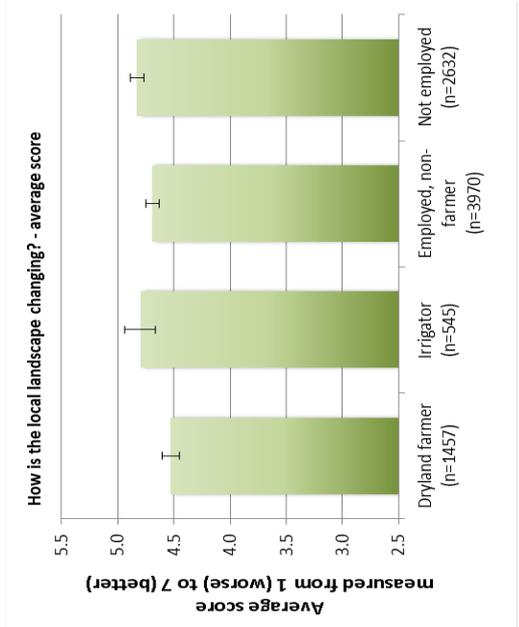
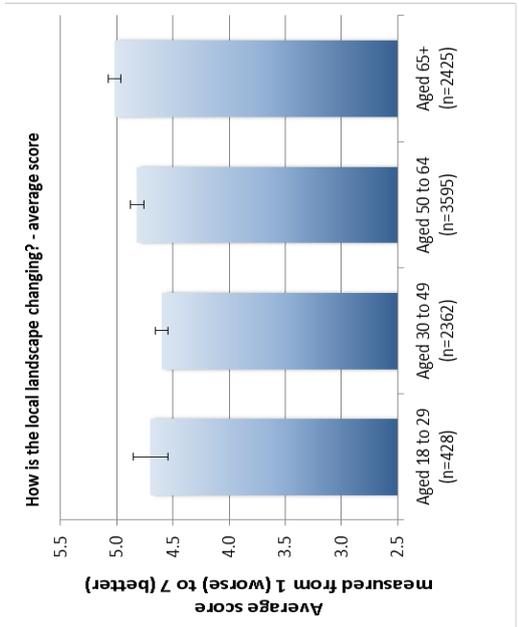
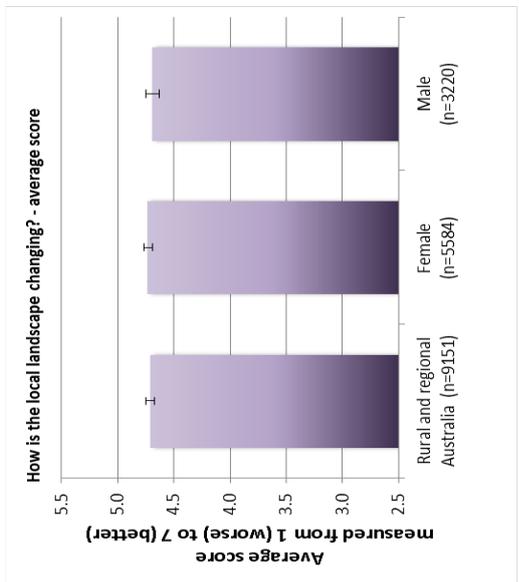


Figure 2.2q Changes in local landscape and surrounds, by group

Economy

As shown in Figure 2.2r, people living in Queensland were much more likely than those living in other states to feel that their local economy was getting worse. Those living in Victoria and New South Wales were more likely than those other states to feel their local economy was improving. In South Australia and Western Australia, residents were much more likely to report their local economy was worsening than improving.

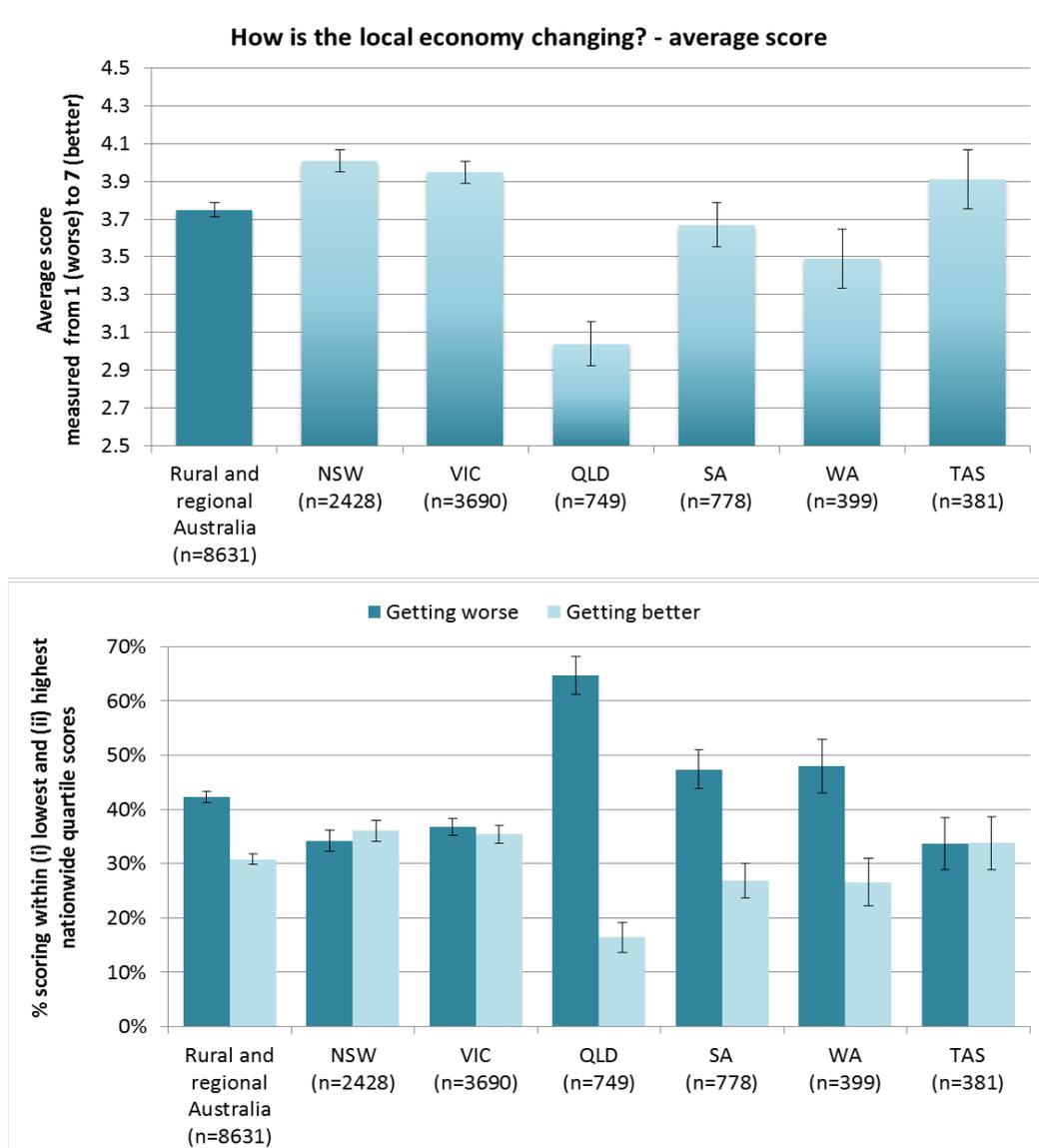


Figure 2.2r Changes in the local economy, by state

When examined by region, people living in all Queensland regions were highly likely to feel their local economy was worsening. In other states, views varied much more between regions. For example in Western Australia, confidence in the economy was lowest in the Mid West Gascoyne & Goldfields Esperance, a little less negative in the Wheatbelt, and more positive in the Great Southern & South West. In South Australia, confidence was highest in regions near Adelaide and lowest in the Limestone Coast and in Western & Northern SA. In New South Wales, confidence was slightly lower in the northern half of the state, while in Victoria it was slightly lower in the Barwon South West and Gippsland regions compared to the rest of the state (Figure 2.2s). When different groups were

compared (Figure 2.2t), men and women reported almost identical views. Those aged 65 and older were more likely than younger people to report that their local economy was improving. Dryland farmers were more likely than either irrigators or non-farmers to report that their local economy was getting worse, with 48% reporting it was getting worse compared to 42% of rural and regional Australians.

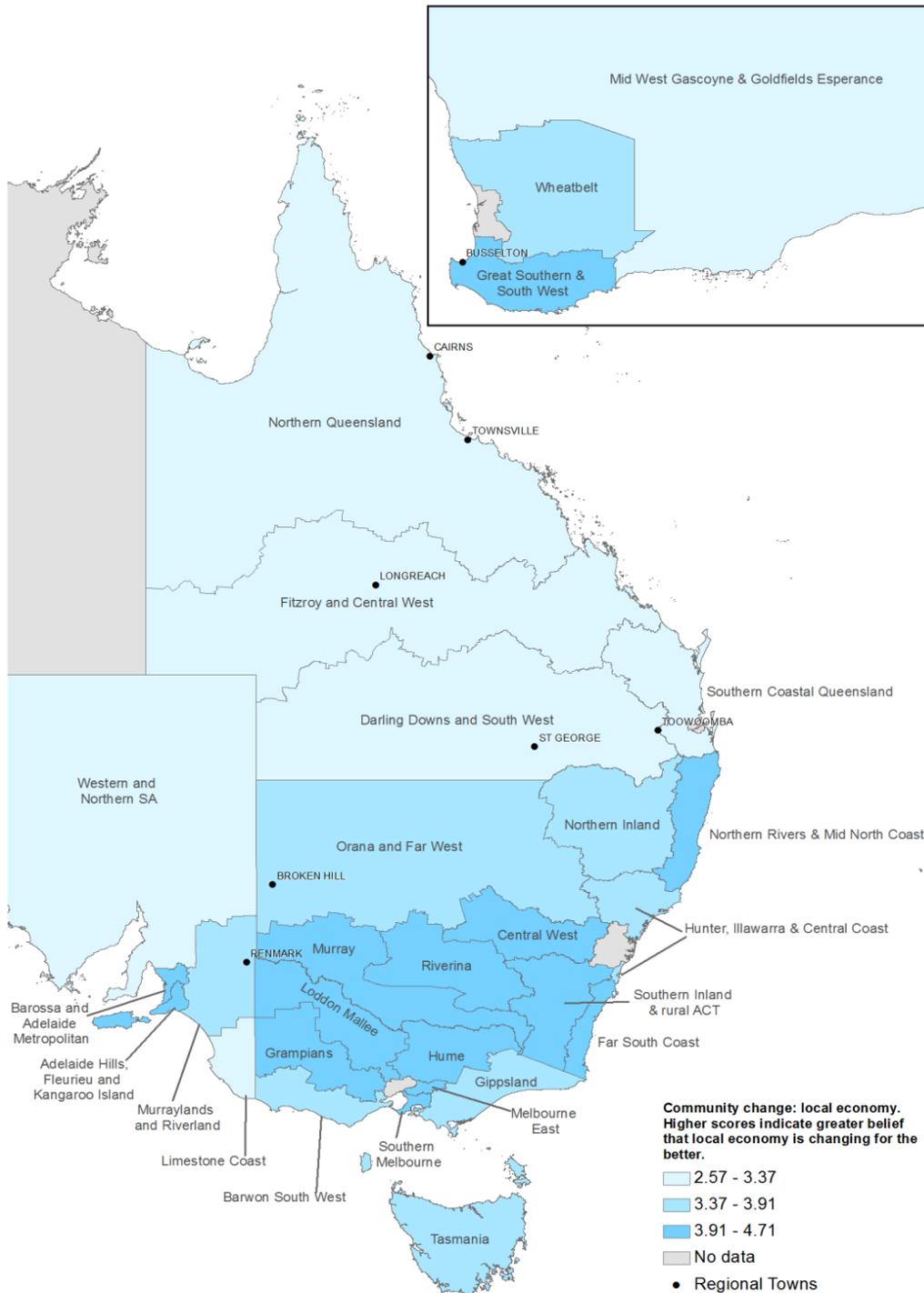


Figure 2.2s Changes in the local economy, by region

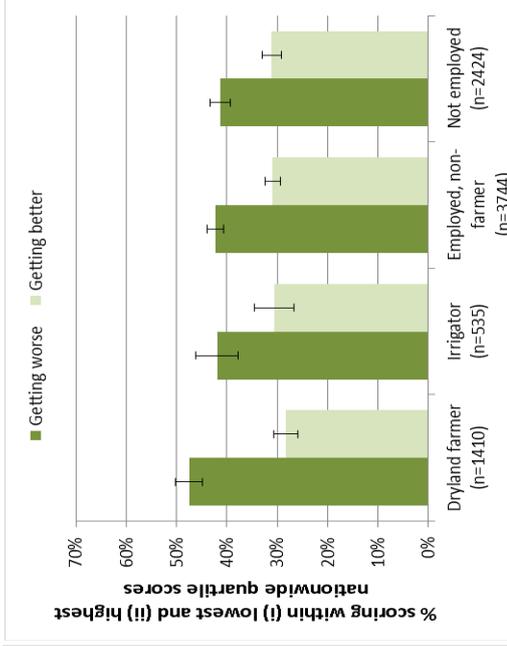
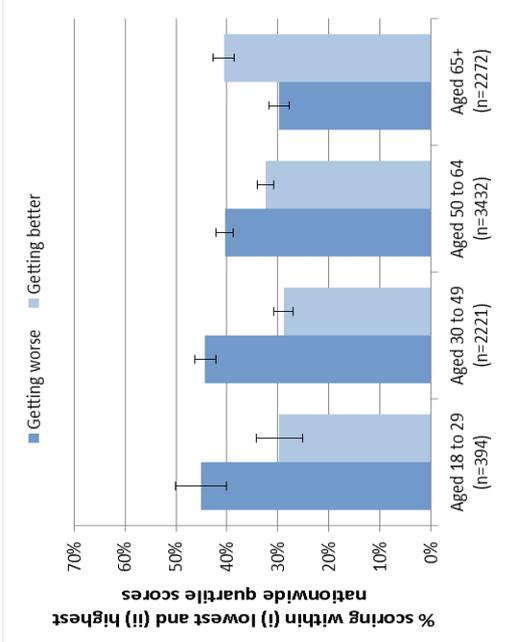
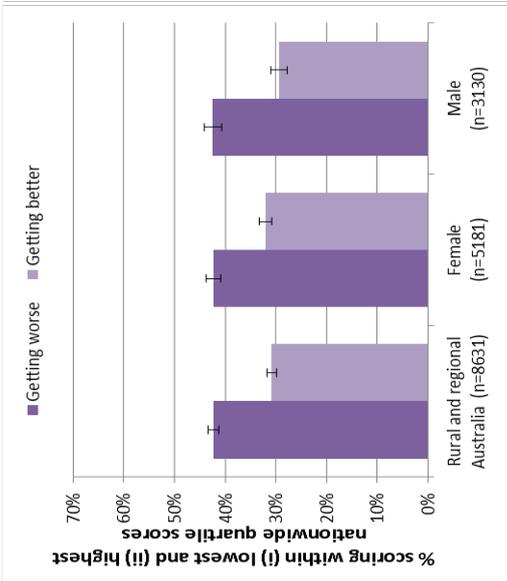
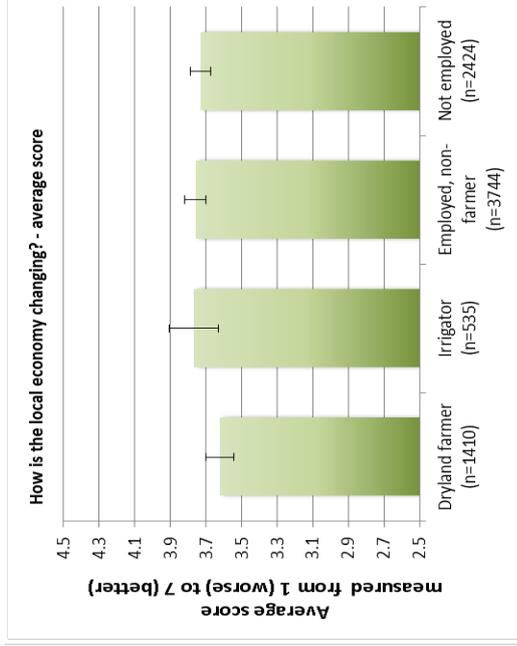
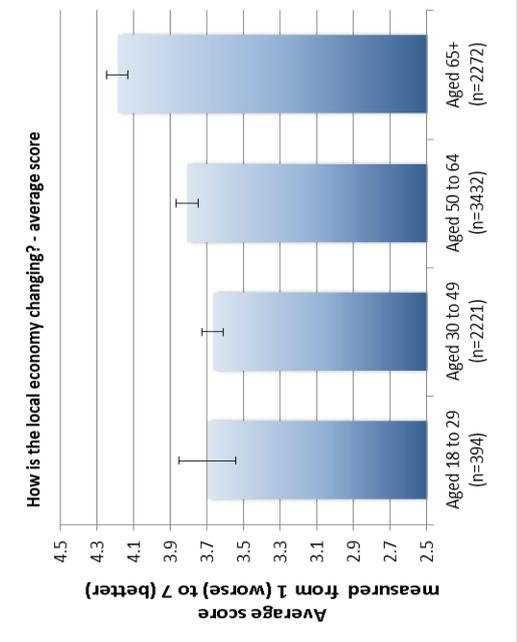
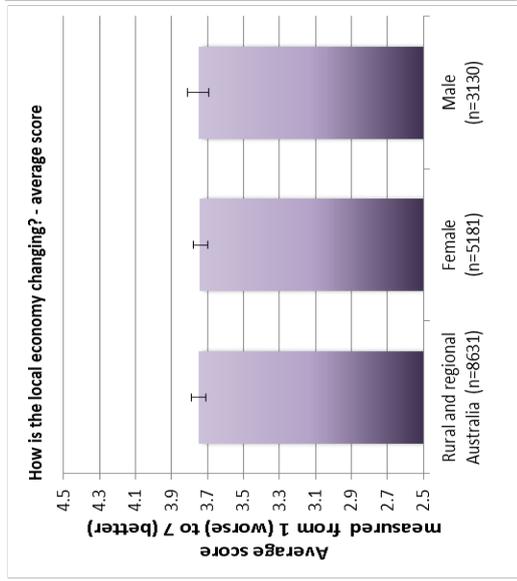


Figure 2.2t Changes in the local economy, by group

Community reputation

Almost three quarters of rural and regional Australians (73%) would recommend their community to others as a good place to live (Figure 2.2u). Queenslanders were significantly less likely to be willing to recommend their community to others (63%), and residents of Victoria and New South Wales slightly more likely to (77% and 78%). Older people were more likely to recommend their community to others as a good place to live compared to younger people, but there was no significant difference between women and men, or farmers and non-farmers. When examined by region (Figure 2.2v), people living in the Northern Rivers & Mid North Coast (NSW), Far South Coast (NSW), Melbourne East (Vic), Southern Melbourne (Vic), and Barossa & Adelaide Metropolitan (SA) regions were most likely to say they would recommend their community to others.

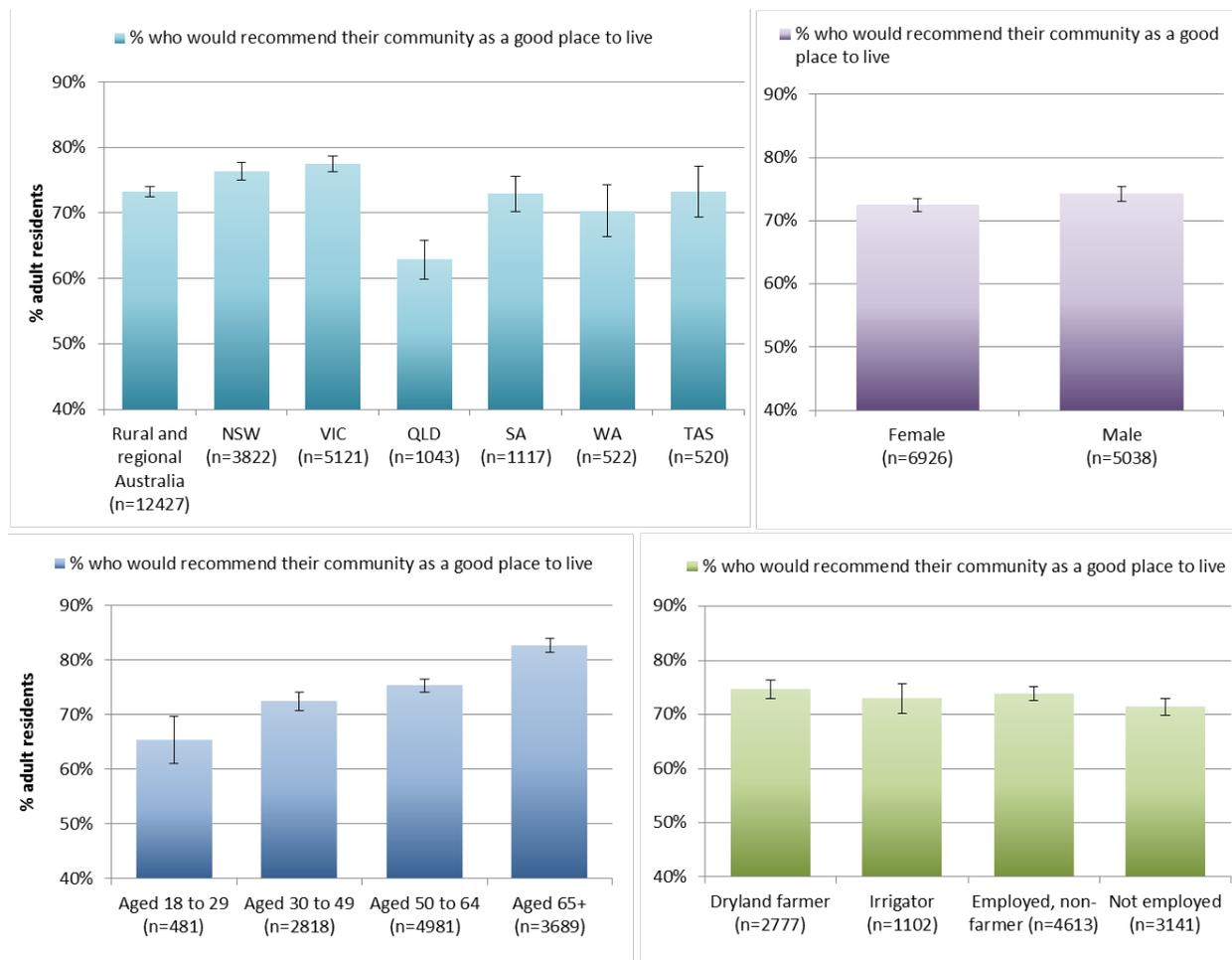


Figure 2.2u Proportion of residents who would recommend their community as a good place to live, by state and group

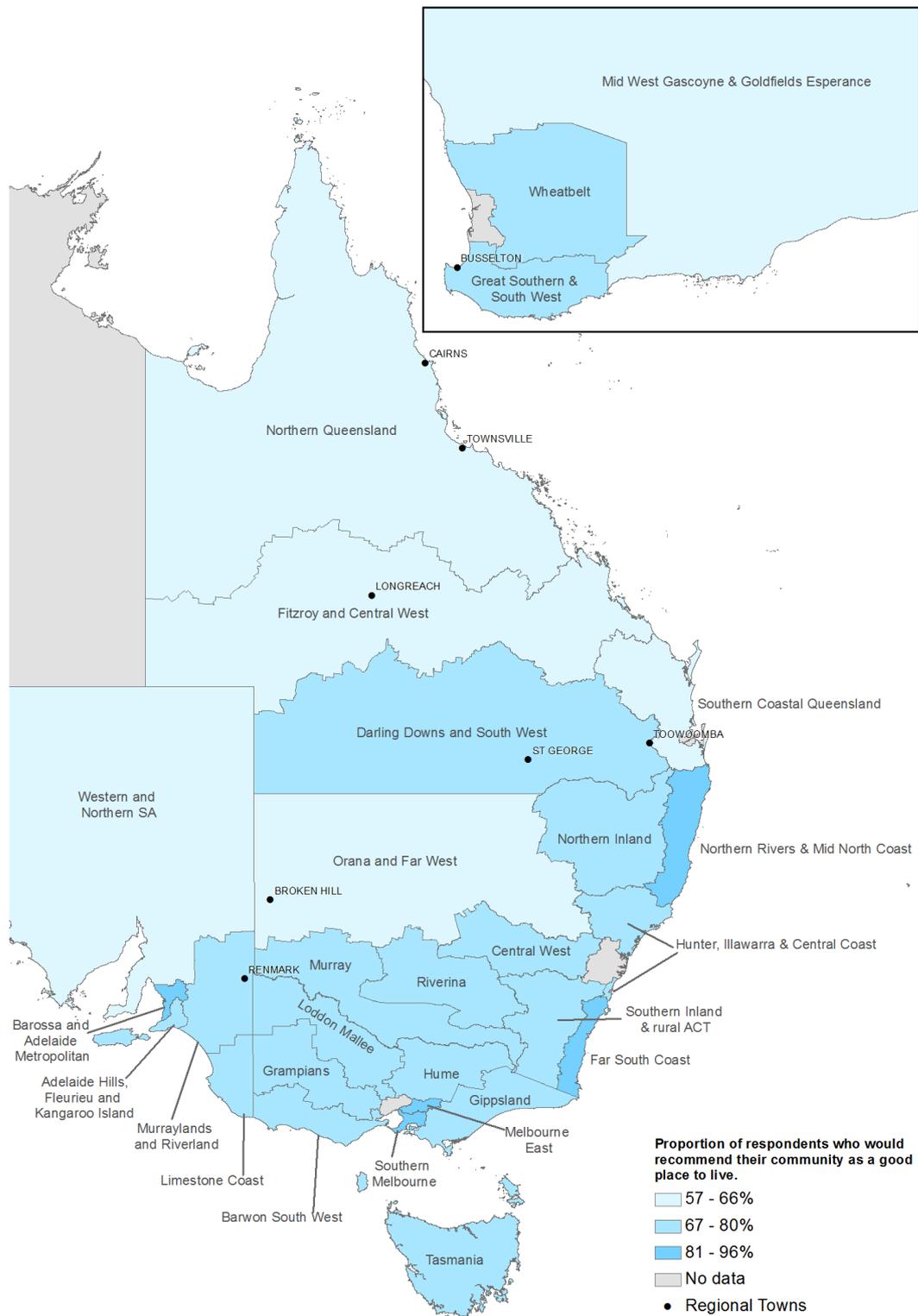


Figure 2.2v Proportion of residents who would recommend their community as a good place to live, by region

Migration intentions

Concerns about depopulation often dominate public discussions about the liveability and future of many of Australia’s smaller rural communities. This highlights the importance of migration as a marker of the liveability of a community. Many studies have shown that migration is associated with poorer wellbeing in the period leading up to the move (Schirmer and Berry 2014), and that wellbeing often remains poorer for many months after moving (Luhmann et al. 2012). This suggests that migration intentions can be a useful indicator of the overall liveability and wellbeing of a community: if a large proportion of residents in a given community are considering shifting to a new community, it is likely to indicate problems with liveability. This can be measured not just by examining how many people are actively considering shifting in the near future, but also by examining how many people have considered shifting in recent years, even if they have not moved.

Likelihood of shifting to a new community

Across rural and regional Australia, 7.5% of people believed that they were likely or very likely to shift to a new community in the next 12 months (Figure 2.2w). People aged under 30 were most likely to be considering shifting, and those aged 65 and older least likely to. Men were more likely to be planning to shift than women. People living in Western Australia and New South Wales were slightly more likely than those in other states to be considering migrating, and those living in Tasmania and South Australia least likely to be. Dryland farmers were more likely to be considering migrating than irrigators.

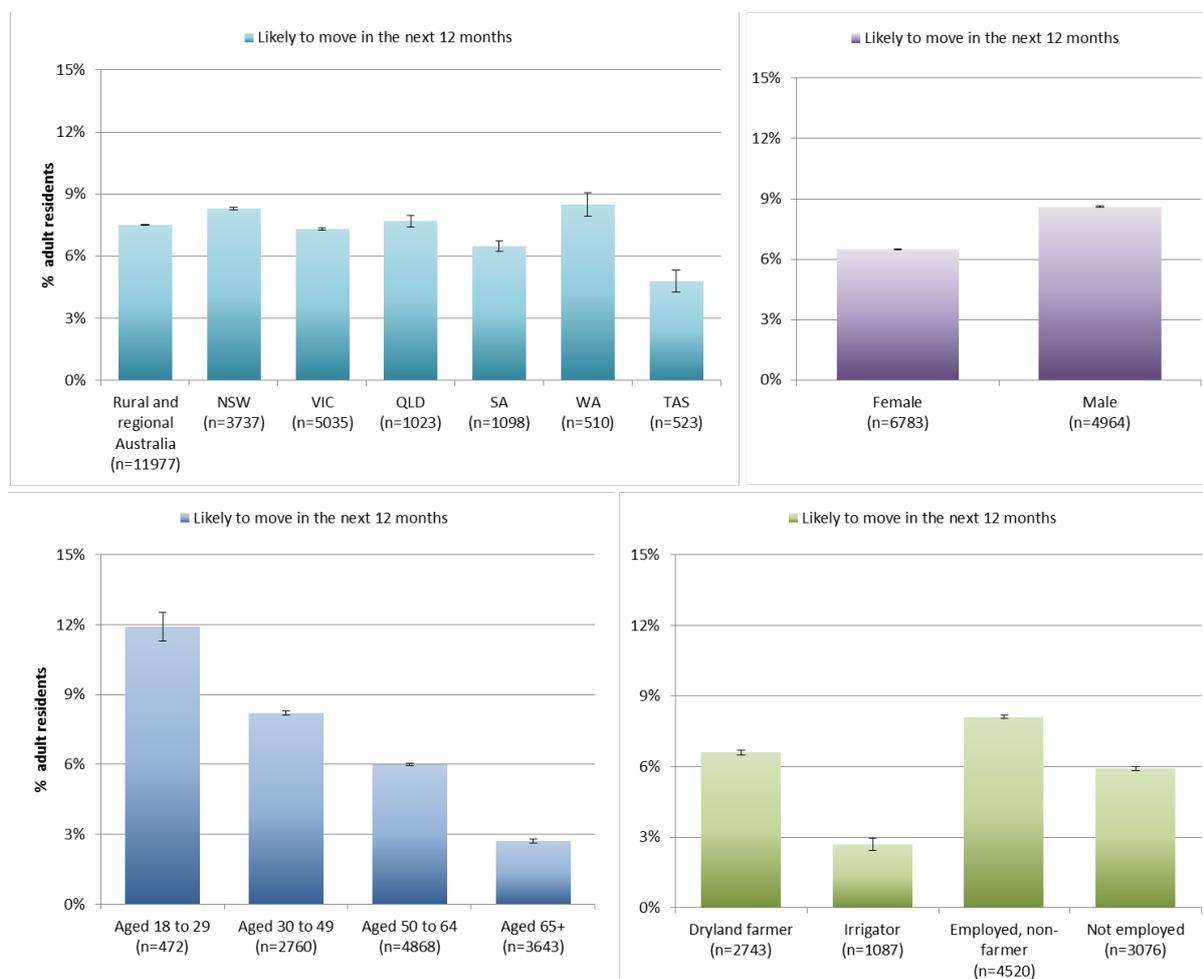


Figure 2.2w Proportion of residents who are likely to move in the next 12 months, by state and group

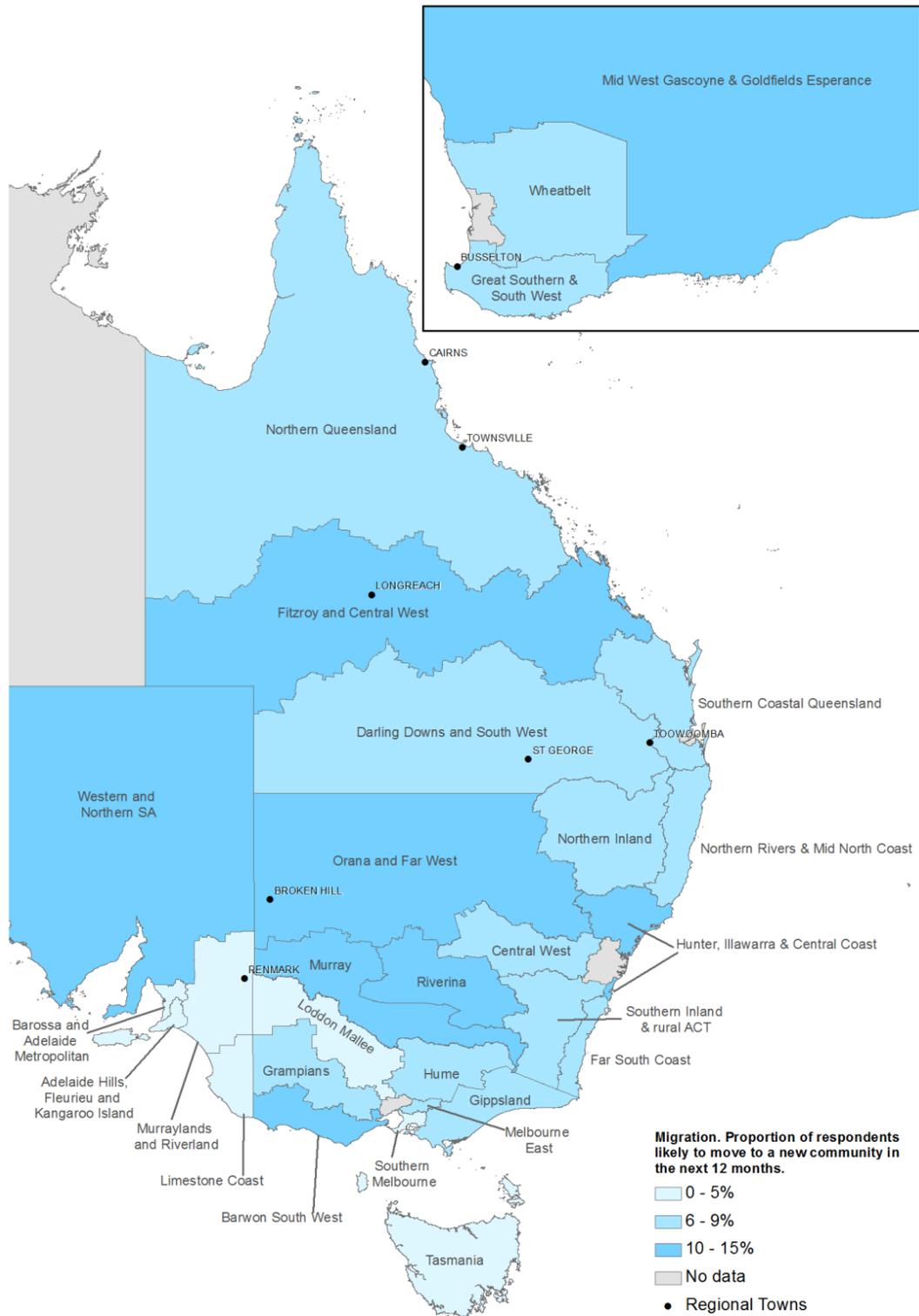


Figure 2.2x Proportion of residents who felt they were likely to move in the next 12 months, by region

Deciding not to migrate

Many people may consider migrating but decide not to. Previous Regional Wellbeing Survey reports examined this issue in more depth (see Schirmer et al. 2015a) and identified that many people wish to migrate but choose not to for a range of reasons including difficulty with the finances required to shift, availability of employment, and the needs of other family members. In 2015, just over two thirds (38%) of rural and regional Australians reported that they had considered shifting to a new community at some point within the past three years, but decided not to (Figure 2.2y). People living in Queensland, women, younger people, and non-farmers were most likely to have considered shifting but not done so, while those living in South Australia, men, older people and farmers were least likely to have considered moving. People living in all regions of Queensland, as well as the majority of regions in NSW, were more likely to have considered shifting but not done so than those living in other regions (Figure 2.2z). Those living in the Northern Rivers & Mid North Coast (NSW), Hume (Vic), Melbourne East (Vic), Southern Melbourne (Vic), Murraylands & Riverland (SA), Barossa & Adelaide Metropolitan (SA), and Adelaide Hills Fleurieu & Kangaroo Island (SA) regions were least likely to report having considered migrating in the last three years.

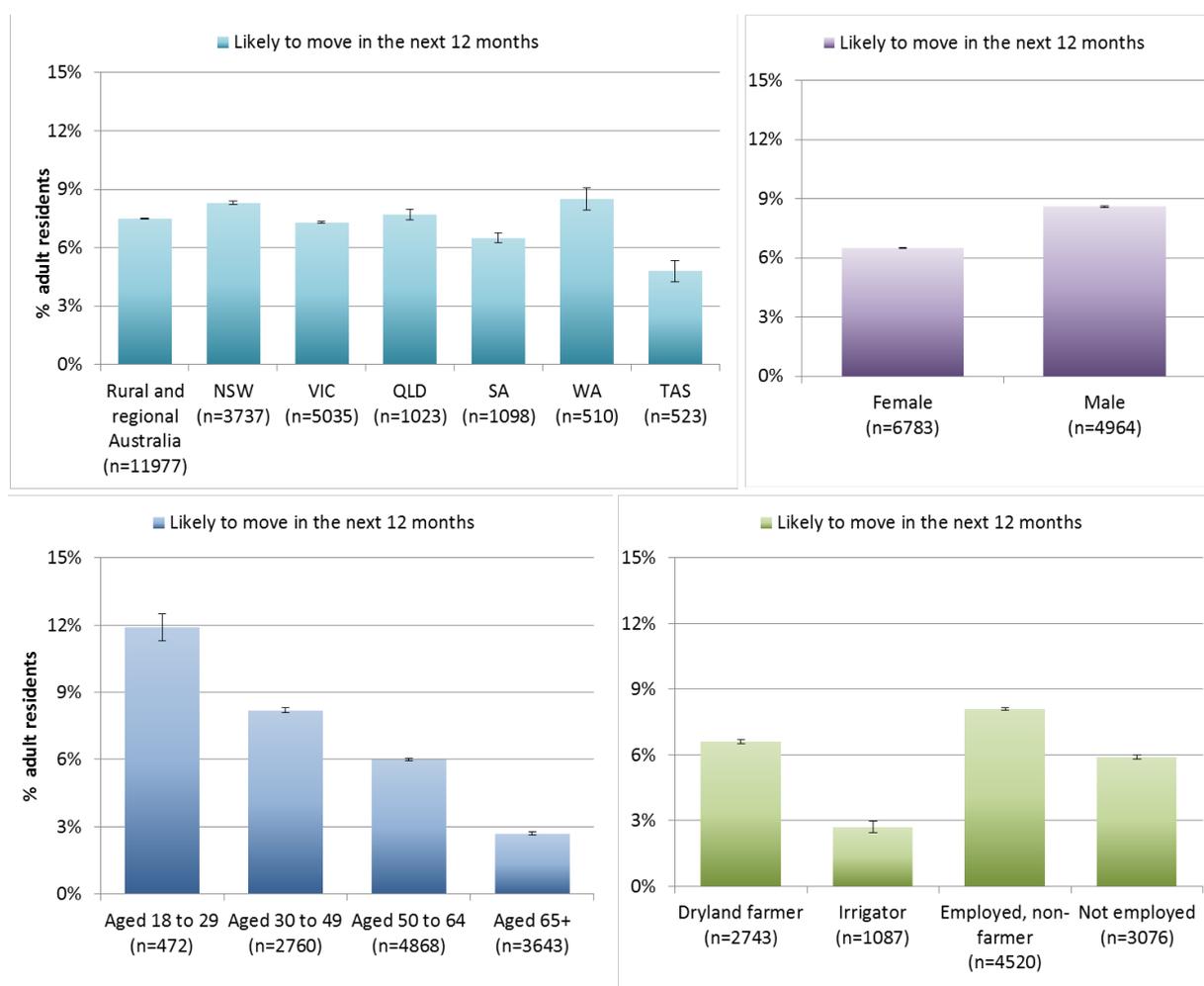


Figure 2.2y Proportion of residents who had considered moving in the past three years but decided not to, by state and group¹⁹

¹⁹ Note that the number of respondents to this question is lower than for most others; this is because this question was only asked of people who completed the online survey in 2015, and only of those who had lived in their community for three years or longer.

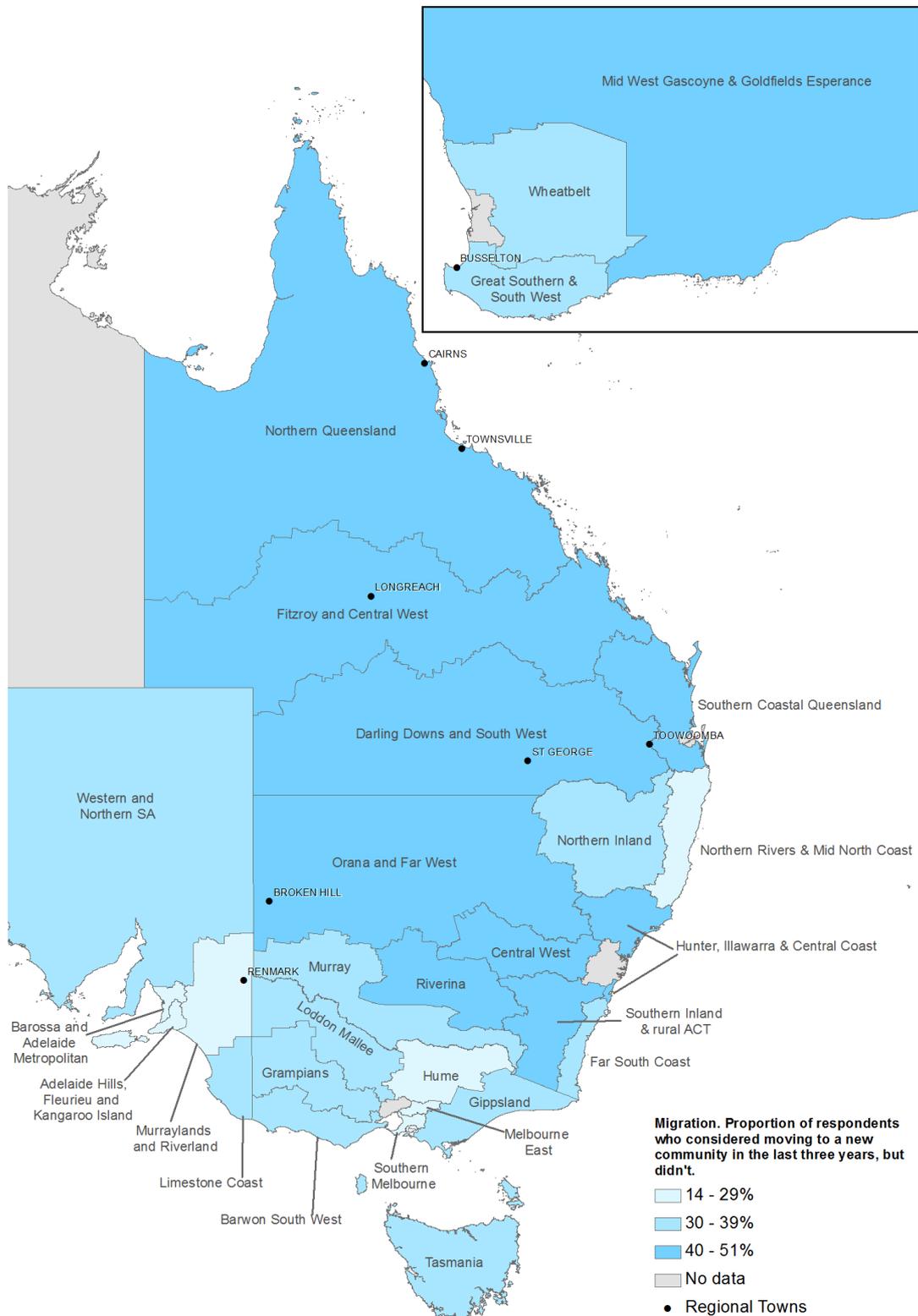


Figure 2.2z Proportion of residents who had considered moving in the past three years but decided not to, by region

Conclusions

Between 2014 and 2015, the CWI fell slightly across rural and regional Australia. This national fall reflected in particular a decline in the CWI in the states of Queensland and Western Australia. Overall, those living in Queensland had lower confidence in their community's future, were more likely to feel liveability was declining, less likely to recommend their community to others as a place to live; however, they were not more likely to be planning to migrate than those in other states.

At the regional scale, of particular concern is declining community wellbeing in three regions, the Mid West Gascoyne & Goldfields Esperance (WA), Orana & Far West (NSW) and Riverina (NSW) regions. Meanwhile, in the Far South Coast (NSW) region community wellbeing increased on most measures between 2014 and 2015, and residents of this region were more likely than those in most other regions to report a strong sense of growing friendliness and liveability.

Just over half of rural and regional Australians felt that their community's friendliness (55%), liveability (51%) and local landscape and surrounds (56%) were changing for the better; only 18% to 23% felt each of these were changing for the worse. Queensland residents were more likely than those in other parts of rural and regional Australia to feel the liveability, friendliness and local landscape in their local community was declining, and Tasmanians most likely to feel these were improving. In total, 42% of rural and regional Australians felt their economy was worsening, particularly those living in Queensland and Western Australia; only 31% felt that local economic conditions were improving.

Farmers were less likely than non-farmers to feel their community was changing for the better in terms of liveability and friendliness. In particular dryland farmers were less likely than other farmers or non-farmers to feel their community was improving in terms of the local economy, friendliness, local economic activity and the local landscape. Dryland farmers were also more likely than irrigators to be considering shifting to a new community.