Community Trust in Rural Industries

Research Outcomes

Rural industries (fishers, farmers and foresters) have collaborated to develop a pathway to proactive, transparent, long term engagement with the community via a three-year research program into the drivers of community trust.
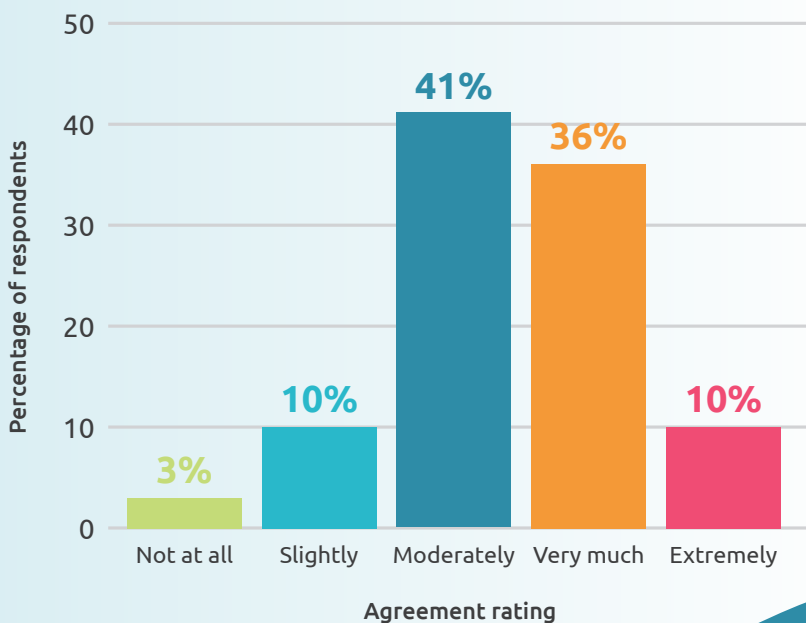
Year one research findings at a glance

1 Trust in rural industries is generally strong but levels of trust vary across the community and by industry.

How much do you trust Australian rural industries overall to act responsibly?

Chart — Percentage of respondents by Agreement rating:
- Not at all: 3%
- Slightly: 10%
- Moderately: 41%
- Very much: 36%
- Extremely: 10%

2 At a sector-wide level, the community sees rural industries primarily as responsible stewards of the land and sea.

3 | **The research identified the three strongest drivers of community trust in rural industries as:**

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Having confidence that industries are using the land in a sustainable, responsible way with minimal impact or damage, and not compromising the environment for profit.

RESPONSIVENESS

Industry demonstrating that they are listening to, respecting and responding to community concerns and perspectives.

PRODUCTS OF RURAL INDUSTRIES

The community highly values the sector's outputs, with its products seen to play an important role in the lives of Australians.

4 | **Rural industries are connected to each other in the eyes of the community**

Almost half (48 per cent) of all respondents agreed that if they hear about a rural industry acting irresponsibly, it negatively affects their opinion of all rural industries.
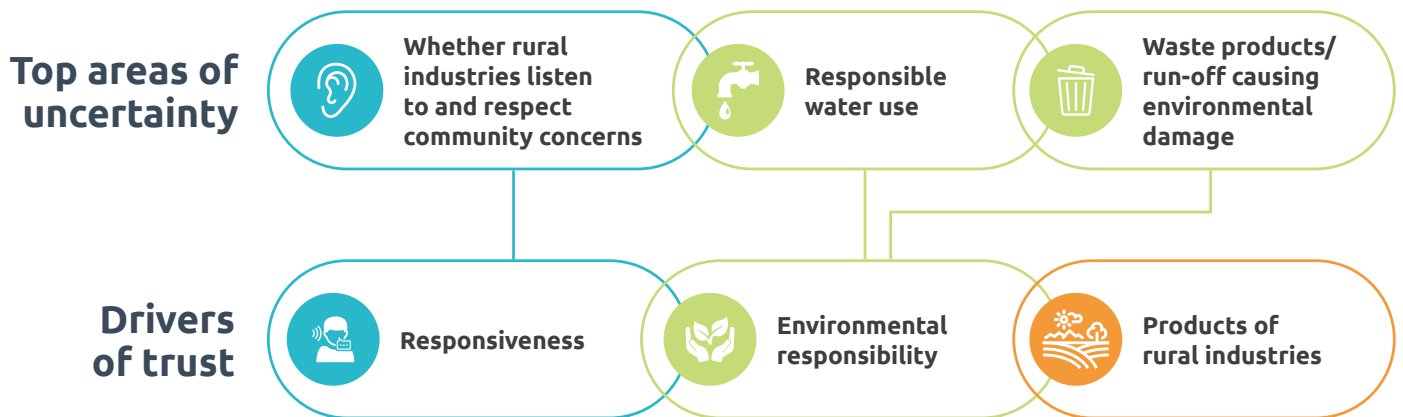
48%

5 **The research uncovered a number of issues that large sections of the community were uncertain about -**

(meaning they do not have strong views one way or another or have gaps in their knowledge around Australian rural industries).

Some of these areas of uncertainty included the extent to which rural industries listen to and engage with community concerns; use water responsibly; and impact coastal areas through' waste products/run-off.

Top areas of uncertainty

Whether rural industries listen to and respect community concerns

Responsible water use

Waste products/run-off causing environmental damage

Drivers of trust

Responsiveness

Environmental responsibility

Products of rural industries

Notably, most of the issues the community expressed uncertainty about relate to the two key drivers of trust - environmental responsibility and sector responsiveness.

6 **As stewards of the land and sea, the community expects farmers, fishers and foresters to use resources responsibly and sustainably.**

Industries need to ensure that their production systems, practices and processes align with community expectations, particularly around environmental management. This may require practice change in areas that do not align with community expectations. Education or communication campaigns alone will not create alignment, trust can only be built through a combination of industry action and community engagement.

What does this mean for rural industries?

The research reinforces that **community wants to know it is being heard and understood by farmers, fishers and foresters**, and seeks ongoing reassurance that their concerns are being addressed. This requires industry to be responsive to community attitudes and to communicate any changes.

The community does not expect industry to be faultless, but it **does expect industry to proactively engage on areas of community concern**, and in turn respond to breaking issues quickly and openly.

There is opportunity for industries to respond productively and consistently. The research showed that **one industry acting irresponsibly negatively affects the community's opinion of all rural industries.**

Having available guidance on best-practice approaches will empower farmers, fishers and foresters to build trust in their own industries and in the sector.

The community's main information sources are the internet, television news, television current affairs and social media. **These channels can be used by industry to communicate action and engage directly with the community**, particularly on those issues where large portions of the community were uncertain.

The findings show that the pathway to building and **maintaining community trust is to be genuinely responsive to community attitudes**, particularly around environmental sustainability and resource use. **The key is to demonstrate responsiveness through action.** Telling the community you are doing the right thing is not enough. Proactive, transparent, long term engagement on emerging issues and concerns is required.