

Billions of Water-Using Minutes

September 2021



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Background

Leading on from our 2019 study ‘Australia’s Relationship with water’ and the success of the inaugural Water Night in 2020, we commissioned further consumer research.

Our initial research helped us to uncover the subconscious nature of using taps and furthermore the lack of water education and experience that was leading to low water literacy and less water efficient behaviour amongst the Australian community, especially young adults.

In 2020 we acted on the research by launching Water Night which was an exceptionally successful water awareness initiative.

However, we found the research we had, information and narratives around ‘water mindfulness’, to be limited and we found it challenging to stretch it across several angles.

We realised we needed to develop several tailored pitches to secure earned media across different channels – we needed to find a really strong news angle.

Media always needs to be timely and topical. These days the news windows continue to get shorter and with COVID even more so. So, this year we generated data and research that set a foundation for wider angles including water use, literacy, behaviours, terminology; viewed by state and generation, that we could utilise with different target media audiences.

Executive Summary

In September 2021, we commissioned a new piece of quantitative research delving into attitudes and actions of Australians around the use of tap water. The sample comprised of a nationally representative sample of 1,044 Australians aged 18 years and older.

The research explored generational and state differences in terms of how many minutes they spent using water in different areas of the home. The research revealed a stark contradiction between our attitudes and actions, specifically how much we say we value water and how we use it.

We believe if Australians were more conscious of when and how they reached for their taps, they would be more mindful about turning it on in the first place and they may start cutting unnecessary use and ultimately waste less.



Australians have taps running for **12.2 billion minutes a week**

The average person runs taps for 88 minutes per day – a massive **635 billion minutes per year**

Rinsing items in the kitchen sink and filling up bottles were amongst the top actions that resulted in the most tap use.

The nation needs to wake up to its tap dependency, if young people are made aware of how often they are turning on the tap and the preciousness of water as a finite resource, they will start cutting unnecessary use and ultimately waste less.

91% of Australians believe that it is important to monitor water usage in the home and garden, however, our actions are falling short.

Only 18% of Australians reported actually being aware of how they use water in the home.

51% say they are unable to recall how many times they have used any tap at home in the last 12 hours.

Only 11% of Australians say they know exactly how many times they have used the tap at home in the past 12 hours.

8 in 10 Australians would be likely to reduce their water consumption if they were made aware of easy steps to do so.

Generation Z demonstrated the least interest in using water mindfully and the least understanding that water is a finite resource.

Overall, Gen Z had taps running for approximately **2 hours 7 minutes per day**, compared to the average Australian at 1hr and 28 minutes per person, per day.

There is a **huge contrast between states**

with West Australians using 1 hour and 51 minutes of water per day, and Victorians using 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Methodology

This study was conducted online between 2–6 September 2021.

The sample comprised of a nationally representative sample of **1,044** Australians aged 18 years and older

YouGov designed the questionnaire.

Following the completion of interviews, the data was weighted by age, gender and region to reflect the latest ABS population estimates.

The research used the methodology of expressing water use in terms of 'Water Using Minutes' which is a unique approach versus the typical litres and gigalitres of old or the standard comparative methods i.e., same as an Olympic swimming pool or 6 Sydney Harbours. We were able to add a set of statistics to our original research with regards to tap touches, water efficiency, real behaviour and terminology.



Key findings

Importance of tap water

Almost all

(94%) Australians, equivalent to 1.9 million people, say that tap water is very/ somewhat important to them, with three in four (76%) saying it is very important.

Younger Australians

aged 18–34 are almost twice as likely than those aged 50+ to say that water is only somewhat important to them (24% compared to 13%).

Only 4%

believe tap water is not that/ not at all important to them, and a further 2% are unsure or haven't thought about the importance of tap water to them.

West Australians

(100%) are more likely than South Australians (91%) and Queenslanders (93%) to say that tap water is very/ somewhat important to them.

Older Australians

aged 50+ are considerably more likely than their younger counterparts aged 18–34 to consider tap water as very important to them (83% compared to 68%).

Awareness of energy and water usage

When considering how they use energy and water inside and outside their home,

Australians are more likely to be aware of their energy usage (36%) than their water usage (18%).



However, **four in ten**

(43%) say that their awareness of their energy and water usage is about the same, while 3% are unsure as to whether they are more aware of their energy or water usage.

Differences among age groups

were also evident, with younger Australians aged 18-34 being more likely than their older counterparts aged 50+ to say that they are more aware of their water usage (25% compared to 15%).

On the other hand, **older Australians**

aged 50+ are more likely than those aged 18-34 to say that their awareness of their energy and water usage is about the same (51% compared to 33%).

Furthermore, Australians living in **capital cities**

(49%) are more likely than those that aren't (39%) to say that their awareness of their energy and water usage is about the same.

Importance of being aware of water usage

Nine in ten

(91%) Australians, say that it is very/somewhat important to be aware of your water usage, with more than half (55%) saying that it is very important.

Only 8%

say that it is not that/not at all important, and a further 1% are unsure as to whether it is important to them to be aware of their water usage.

Women

re more likely than men to believe that it is very/somewhat important to be aware of your water usage (93% compared to 88%), and conversely men are more likely than women to believe it is not that/ not at all important (10% compared to 6%).

Older Australians

aged 50+ are considerably more likely than their younger counterparts aged 18-34 to consider it very important to be aware of your water usage (64% compared to 42%), while younger Australians aged 18-34 are more likely than those aged 50+ to consider it only somewhat important to them (45% compared to 30%).

Interestingly

Australians from VIC (10%) are twice as likely as those from QLD (5%) to say that it is not that/ not at all important to be aware of your water usage.



Reasons for the awareness of water usage being important

The most popular reasons as to why Australians believe it is important to be aware of your water usage is because

we need water to live (69%), to save money on their water bill (56%) and water is a finite resource (50%).

Other reasons

why water is thought to be important are because water usage can prevent drought (39%), living under water restrictions is inconvenient (25%) and that their garden looks bad when they don't water it (18%).

Differences between the genders

are also apparent, with women being more likely than men to say that being aware of water usage is important because we need water to live (73% compared to 66%).

Younger Australians

aged 18-34 are more likely than older Australians aged 50+ to say it is important to be aware of your water usage to help prevent drought (44% compared to 33%), while older Australians aged 50+ are more likely than those aged 18-34 to believe it is important because we need water to live (72% compared to 61%) and because their garden looks bad when they don't water it (20% compared to 12%).

Water definitions

Interviewees were asked to match different terms about water conservation with a series of provided definitions including; Water Efficiency, Water Saving, Water Mindfulness, Water Awareness and Water Wasting.

'Water wasting'

was the only term where the vast majority of Australians (75%) agreed on the definition.





Frequency of different tasks and water usage

Overall, Aussies are spending **12.2 billion minutes a week on water consuming activities. This is a massive 635 billion minutes each year.**

Australians are spending the most time on water consuming activities by

- running washing machines (almost 2.8 billion minutes a week),
- running dishwashers (almost 1.9 billion minutes a week),
- washing their hands in the home or garden (1.6 billion minutes a week) and
- taking a shower (almost 1.4 billion minutes a week).

Things done regularly / consistently

Almost all (95%) Australians do not regularly count the number of times they turn on a tap each day.

Eight in ten

do not consistently use only rainwater in the garden (80%) and recycle water from taps (79%).

Seven in ten

do not regularly position garden sprinklers carefully so no water lands on paved areas (73%), install water saving nozzles on garden hoses (72%) and invest in water efficient appliances (70%).

Around two in three

do not consistently clean the car with a bucket of water instead of a hose (65%), install water efficient taps / shower heads (62%) and avoid washing up dishes under taps (60%).

More than half

of Australians do not regularly fill up the dishwasher before it goes on (59%), check for leaks in taps, pipes and toilets (56%), water the garden during the early or late parts of the day (54%) and keep showers to less than five minutes (53%).

Half of Australians

do not consistently fill up the washing machine before it goes on and use a broom not a hose to clean paved areas (50% each).

As many as 1.4 million

Aussies do not regularly do any of the above.

Things done regularly / consistently

Women

are more likely than men to regularly fill up the washing machine before it goes on (58% compared to 42%), water the garden during the early or late parts of the day (51% compared to 41%) and always fill up the dishwasher before it goes on (46% compared to 35%).

Men

(7%) are more likely than women (3%) to say they consistently count the number of times they turn on a tap each day.

Older Australians

aged 50+ are more likely to do all of these water saving/ smart techniques more regularly than their younger counterparts aged 18-34 with the exception of counting the number of times they turn on a tap each day.



Home tap usage in last 12 hours

Research reveals that **Australians are not always monitoring their water usage,**

with half (51%) saying they are unable to recall how many times they have used any tap at home in the last 12 hours.

Three in ten

(29%) say that they could not be entirely sure how many times they have used any tap at home in the past 12 hours and a further one in five (22%) do not think about it at all.

Only 11%

of Australians say they know exactly how many times they have used the tap at home in the past 12 hours.

Men

are more likely than women to say that they can recall how many times they have used any tap at home in the past 12 hours (56% compared to 43%), and conversely,

women

are more likely than men to say that they cannot recall their usage (57% compared to 44%).

Older Australians

aged 50+ (31%) are more likely than younger Australians aged 18-34 (25%) to say that they couldn't be entirely sure of how many times they have used any tap at home in the last 12 hours.

Interestingly, **Australians with children**

under the age of 18 at home (55%) are more likely to say that they can recall how many times they have used any tap at home in the last 12 hours, compared to those who do not have children under 18 at home (48%).

Similarly, **working Australians**

(54%) are more likely than those not working (43%) to say that they can recall how many times they have used any tap at home in the last 12 hours.

Likelihood to try and reduce water consumption

Encouragingly,

eight in ten

(82%) Australians say that if they had access to easy steps to

conserve water at home

and save on water bills, they would be very/ somewhat likely to try and reduce water consumption, in which half (48%) of those are very likely to do so.

Only 3%

say they would be very/ somewhat unlikely to do so, and a further 3% are unsure as to whether they would try and reduce water consumption if they were provided with access to easy steps to conserve water at home and save on water bills.

Women

are more likely than men to say that they would be very likely to try and reduce water consumption if provided with easy steps to do so (52% compared to 44%).

Similarly,

older Australians

aged 50+ are more likely than their younger counterparts aged 18-34 to say that if they had access to easy steps to conserve water at home and save on water bills, they would be very likely to try and reduce water consumption (52% compared to 40%).

Expectedly, those who believe it is very important to be aware of your water usage (91%) are more likely than those who believe it is only somewhat important (78%) or not that important (53%) to try and

reduce their water consumption.



Findings by State



Western Australia

West Australian residents are running taps for

1 hour and 51 minutes per day –

which is 23 minutes more than the Australian per person average.

92%

of Western Australians believe that it is important to monitor water usage in the home and garden, however, the state's actions are falling short.

Only 15%

of the West's residents, which along with South Australia, was the lowest of all states, reported actually being aware of how they utilise water inside and outside the home.



Victoria

Victorians are running taps for

1 hour 30 minutes per day

2 more minutes than the Australian per person average.

88%

of Victorians believe that it is important to monitor water usage in the home and garden, however, their actions are falling short.

Only 17%

of Victorians reported actually being aware of how they utilise water inside and outside the home.



South Australia

South Australians are running taps for

1 hour and 17 minutes per day

11 minutes less than the Australian per person average.

95%

of South Australians – the highest of all the states – believe that it is important to monitor water usage in the home and garden, however, the state's actions are falling short.

Only 15%

of South Australian residents – which along with Western Australia was the lowest of all states – reported actually being aware of how they utilise water inside and outside the home.



New South Wales

New South Wales residents are running taps for

1 hour and 29 minutes per day

1 more minute than the Australian per person average.

90%

of New South Wales residents believe that it is important to monitor water usage in the home and garden, however, the state's actions are falling short.

Only

19% of New South Wales residents say that they are more aware of their water usage than their energy usage inside and outside their home.



Queensland

Queenslanders are running taps for

1 hour and 13 minutes per day

15 minutes less than the Australian per person average.

93%

of Queenslanders believe that it is important to monitor water usage in the home and garden, however, the state's actions are falling short.

Only 17%

of Queenslanders say that they are more aware of their water usage than their energy usage inside and outside their home.

Findings by Generation

Generation Z

Despite its reputation as the “woke” generation, Gen Z demonstrated the

least interest in using water mindfully

and the least understanding that water is a finite resource.

Gen Z

trailed behind

the Australian average in understanding that water is a finite resource and that it is required to live (6% and 13% respectively).

When it came to considering monitoring their own water usage important, Gen Z were almost 10% less likely to show interest.

This generation had taps running for approximately

2 hours 7 minutes per day,

39 minutes more than the average Australian.

The younger generation was also

least likely

to undertake activities that would prevent unnecessary tap usage such as keeping to shorter showers, using rainwater in the garden, recycling water from taps, scraping dishes instead of rinsing, filling up the dishwasher or washing machines before running as a few examples.

Generation Y (Millennials)

More

millennials claim water is important to them compared to the national average. They were also the most likely to monitor water usage in the home, and could accurately guess how often they’ve used taps within the past 12 hours.

That said, millennials have taps running for approximately

2 hours and 11 minutes per day,

43 minutes more than the average Australian per person, per day.

Generation X

After Gen Z, millennials were

second least likely

to undertake activities that would prevent unnecessary tap usage such as keeping to shorter showers, using rainwater in the garden, recycling water from taps, scraping dishes instead of rinsing, filling up the dishwasher or washing machines before running as a few examples.

While Gen X proved to be mostly aligned with the

national average

when it came to finding water important, and the monitoring of water important – they were the most likely generation to behave accordingly.

Gen X have taps running for

78 minutes per day,

10 minutes less than the national per person average.

Baby Boomers

Boomers had the **highest**

number of people who valued water as important, and highest number who believed monitoring water usage was important.

This generation also had the highest number of people that acknowledge water is a finite resource, and that it is needed to live.

The average boomer has taps running for

53 minutes per day,

35 minutes less than the national per person average.

Boomers were also the most likely to undertake activities that would prevent unnecessary tap usage such as keeping showers to less than 5 minutes, using rainwater in the garden, recycling water from taps, investing in water efficient appliances, utilising a bucket rather than hose to wash the car, scraping dishes instead of rinsing and filling up dishwasher or washing machines before running as a few examples.

Discussion

Aussies are spending 12.2 billion minutes a week on water consuming activities at home.

Our research revealed a contradiction between attitudes and actions when it comes to water use. The study details the subconscious actions that see

the average person running taps for 88 minutes per day – a massive 635 billion minutes per year.

The research revealed a stark contradiction between how much we say we value water, and how we use it. Specifically, 91% of Australians believe that it is important to monitor water usage in the home and garden, however, our actions are falling short. Only 18% of Australians reported actually being aware of how they utilise water in the home.

Rinsing items in the kitchen sink and filling up bottles were amongst the top actions that resulted in the most turning on of taps. These are the three areas where Australian's are often operating on autopilot.

73% of Australians don't worry about positioning sprinklers away from paved and concreted areas. Only 20% of the nation use rainwater in the garden, and just a similar number (21%) recycle water from the home to use in the garden. 60% of Australians **do not** regularly fill the washing machine, and 59% **do not** regularly fill the dishwasher before running them.

Western Australia and South Australian residents had the lowest numbers of people aware of how they use water inside and outside the home. This is despite South Australia having the highest number of people who believe monitoring water usage across the home is important.

West Australians are the guiltiest of running taps in the home and garden excessively – they run taps for 1 hour and 51 minutes a day – which is 23 minutes more than the Australian per person average.

By contrast Queenslanders are running taps for 1 hour and 13 minutes a day – that's 15 minutes less than the Australian per person average.

Monitoring water usage

This research revealed that Australians are not always monitoring their water usage, with

half (51%) saying they are unable to recall how many times they have used any tap at home in the last 12 hours.

Three in ten (29%) say that they could not be entirely sure how many times they have used any tap at home in the past 12 hours and a further one in five (22%) do not think about it at all. Only 11% of Australians say they know exactly how many times they have used the tap at home in the past 12 hours.

We believe if Australians were more conscious of when and how they reached for their taps, they would be more mindful about turning it on in the first place. If they were made aware of how much they are turning on their taps, they would start cutting unnecessary use and ultimately waste less.

We tested terms like 'Water Awareness' and 'Water Mindfulness' to give us some indications of how events like Water Night might have been interpreted. 'Water Waste' continues to be well understood, hence the inclusion in our 2021 Water Night objectives since the focus of the event is to help Australians waste less water rather than saving it. Australia continues to be a nation who hate to think they waste anything.

This research evidences hope for that behavioural change. In fact, it confirmed that 8 in 10 Australians would be likely to reduce their water consumption if they were made aware of easy steps to do so.

Not so woke: Generation Z are the most in need of water wake-up call

The research also shows a startling lax attitude amongst young Australians regarding water.

In fact, it revealed that Gen Z, who is known as the “woke” generation, demonstrated the least interest in using water mindfully and the least understanding that water is a finite resource.

Overall, Gen Z had taps running for approximately 2 hours 7 minutes per day, compared to the average Australian at 1 hour 28 minutes per person, per day.

In fact, Gen Z had the highest volume of people who didn't believe monitoring water usage was important, and the highest number who didn't believe tap water was important.

The research indicated that this lack of care was likely due to lack of understanding. According to the findings, less than half of Gen Z understand that water is a finite resource (50% all Australians), and 40% don't acknowledge that water is required to live (66% of all Australians).

This lack of education or appreciation may explain why the research showed Gen Z are the worst offenders when it comes to unnecessary usage of taps across the home and garden.

Specifically, Gen Z has the highest number who do not implement any water conscious behaviours such as keeping showers to under five minutes, scraping dishes instead of rinsing under a tap and using a broom instead of a hose to clean paved areas.

Given how compassionate and proactive Gen Z typically are with key important issues, it is hoped that water education and experience will inspire significant action. There would seem to be a missing piece of understanding amongst this generation that we need water to live, and as such, how often and for what reason they're touching their taps is critical.

Millennials mostly mindful, but missing the point

More millennials claim water is important to them compared to the national average.

They were also the most likely to monitor water usage in the home,

and could accurately guess how often they've used taps within the past 12 hours.

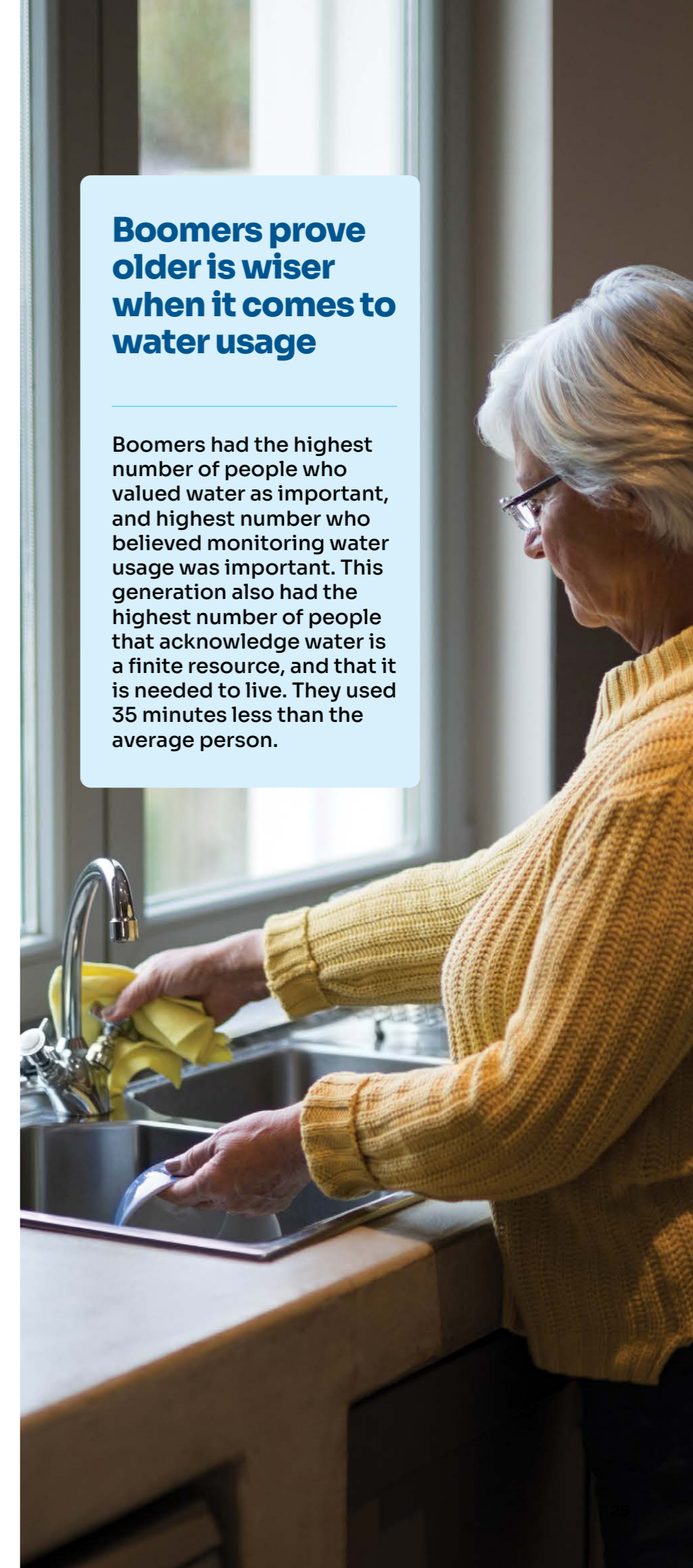
That said, millennials have taps running for approximately 2 hours and 11 minutes per day, 43 minutes more than the average Australian per person, per day – not that far behind Gen X.

Gen X-cellent... at least compared to younger generations

While Gen X proved to be mostly aligned with the national average when it came to finding water important, and the monitoring of water important – they were the most likely generation to behave accordingly. Fabulously, Gen X have taps running for 78 minutes per day, 10 minutes less than the national per person average.

Boomers prove older is wiser when it comes to water usage

Boomers had the highest number of people who valued water as important, and highest number who believed monitoring water usage was important. This generation also had the highest number of people that acknowledge water is a finite resource, and that it is needed to live. They used 35 minutes less than the average person.



Conclusion

This research helped us express water use in a new way, using 'water-using' minutes. The questions we posed helped understand attitudes and literacy amongst participants, building on the research we completed in 2019 with Australia's Relationship with water. We concluded with that paper that Australians have a very sub-conscious relationship with water and barely realise they use it with many people under reporting their use.

The results of this research have provided a better understanding of the actions that see

the average person running taps for 88 minutes per day – 635 billion minutes per year.

This supplementary research has proven this further revealing the a stark contradiction between attitudes and actions when it comes to water use in every generation and State.



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