



# MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY  
DECEMBER 2022

**ENVIRONICS**  
RESEARCH

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# What are the Canadian public's views on oceans and the need for ocean protection, and how has this changed over time?

Canadian public opinion about ocean health and protection was previously measured in 2012, 2016 and 2019. As countries gather in Montreal in December 2022 for the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) and in Vancouver in February 2023 for IMPAC5 (5<sup>th</sup> International Marine Protected Areas Congress), this survey was conducted to provide an updated understanding of public opinion. The research was also designed to identify frames that motivate Canadians to care for, and act on, matters of ocean health and to support marine conservation efforts.

# RESEARCH METHODS

This report is based on a survey conducted with a sample of 1,687 Canadians (18 or older), conducted from November 17 to 30, 2022. A mixed-mode approach was used, with 1,531 interviews conducted with an online panel in the provinces, and 176 interviews conducted by telephone in the Territories.

The sample was stratified by region as outlined in the table below, to ensure adequate subsamples for analysis of smaller regions. Quotas were set by region, age and gender as well as by Indigenous identity (in the Territories). At the analysis stage, the data was weighted to ensure the final sample reflects the actual distribution of the Canadian population per 2021 Census data.

Because the online survey in the provinces uses a non-probability sample, no margin of sampling error can be calculated.

	Total	Terr	BC	AB	SK/MB	ON	QC	ATL
Sample size (unweighted/actual)	1,687	176	181	187	160	380	280	323
Sample size (weighted)	1,687	5	228	194	113	649	388	110
Population (%) per Census	100%	0.3%	13.5%	11.5%	7.0%	38.5%	23.0%	6.5%

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 There is no common understanding of the current state of Canada's oceans, but there is a consensus that things are getting worse; both views remain steady since years prior.** Essentially unchanged from 2019, public views are split between those who rate the health of Canada's oceans as excellent/good (52%) versus only fair/poor (48%). At the same time, most Canadians (67%) continue to believe ocean health has deteriorated over the past decade. The biggest threats are considered to be plastics and "pollution" (in general), although there is increasing awareness of the threat to oceans from climate change.
- 2 The public is contending with a low information environment when it comes to ocean issues.** Relatively few Canadians have heard recent news about oceans - and what they do recall is about the negative impacts, not the parties responsible for those impacts nor potential solutions. As in 2019, there remains limited awareness of MPAs (40%) and of the federal government's commitment to protect 30% of oceans by 2030 (10%). This lack of knowledge means the public is relying on existing or longstanding perceptions, and new information is not breaking through to change minds.
- 3 The idea of marine protected areas as a way to protect oceans continues to resonate strongly with Canadians.** Canadians increasingly recognize the value of a zone or area of the ocean where industrial activities are banned (63% very important to protecting oceans, up five percentage points). Support for MPAs remains high (97% support, including 68% strongly, consistent with 2019). Canadians have strong and consistent ideas of what should be included in MPAs (research, non-motorized sports, eco-tourism and recreational fishing) and what is unacceptable (everything else). They also believe MPAs will do what they are designed for, which is protect marine life (i.e., increase fish populations, increase number and variety of marine species).

# KEY INSIGHTS CON'T.

- 4 The public continues to believe that not enough is being done to protect oceans.** A steady majority of six in ten think Canada is doing an only fair or poor job protecting our oceans. Even as the protected amount of oceans has increased from one percent in 2016, to eight percent in 2019, to just under 15 percent in 2022, the view that this is insufficient continues to be held by three in four Canadians. Moreover, Canadians are four times as likely to say it is critical for Canada to meet its 30 by 30 protection target (80%) than to say there is still plenty of time if we miss the target (20%).
- 5 Canadians are less certain about the potential economic and job impacts of MPAs, in part because their main frame of reference for ocean industries is Canadian fisheries.** Canadians continue to push back against the environment versus economy trade-off: they strongly favour protecting our oceans to protect our economy, rather than prioritizing the economy and jobs by allowing industrial activities in all parts of our oceans. However, it is notable that, by a large margin, the main ocean-dependent industry that people think of is the fishing industry. Thus, when Canadians are less certain that MPAs will have positive impacts on regional economies or on jobs, they may be thinking in the frame of fisheries and the local communities that depend on them rather than about oil and gas, cruise lines or shipping companies. This also may help explain why there are mixed views about whether further restrictions are too costly for ocean industries to bear (53% agree vs 46% disagree).

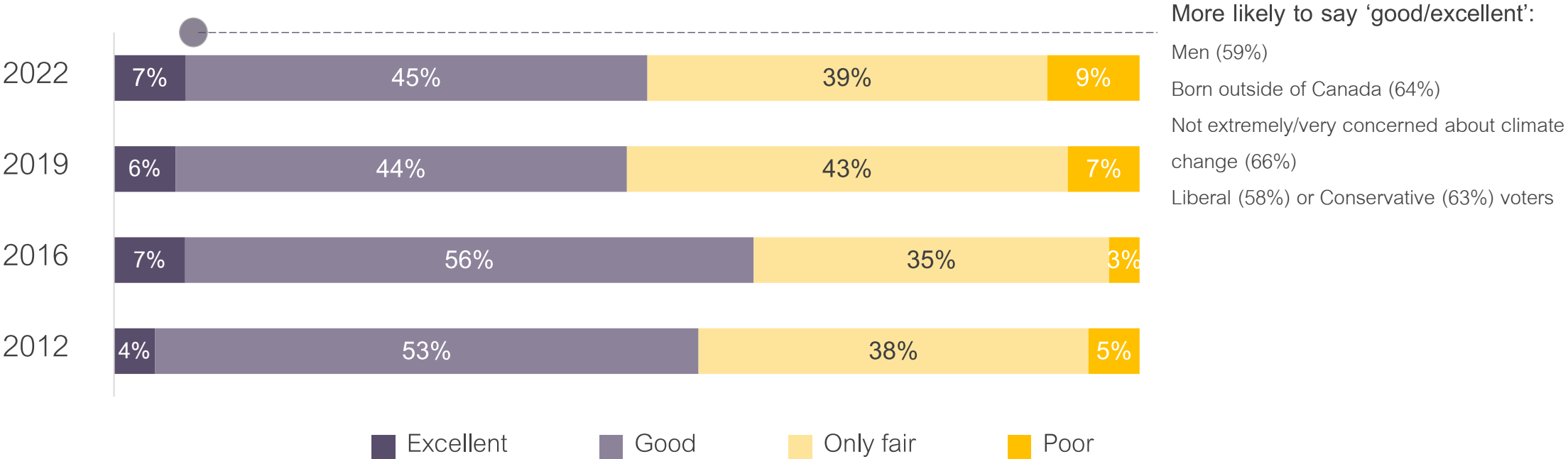
# PERCEPTIONS OF OCEAN HEALTH



# Ocean Health | Perceptions of Canada's ocean health

Perceptions of the health of Canada's oceans remain split with about half of Canadians rating it as excellent or good and the other half feeling more pessimistic (i.e., rating ocean health as only fair or poor), essentially unchanged since 2019.

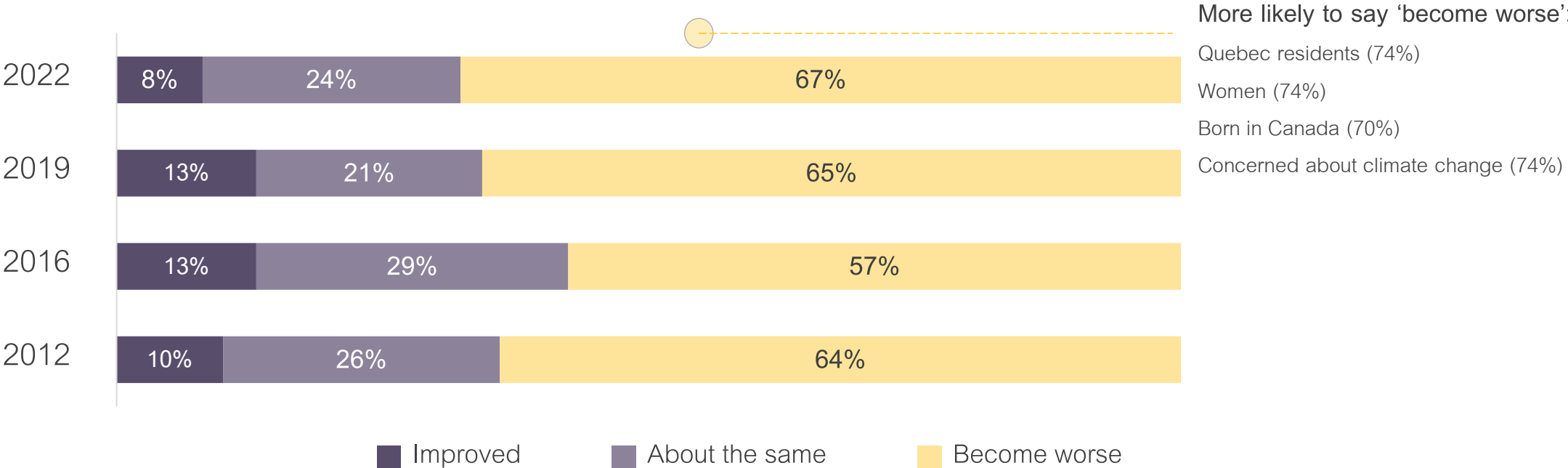
Q1. Canada has 7.1 million square kilometres of oceans, an area equivalent to 70% of its land mass. From what you know or have heard, how would you rate the health of Canada's oceans, that is, the coastal waters of the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic Oceans?



# Ocean Health | **Change in ocean health in past 10 years**

Although there are mixed views about the current health of Canada’s oceans, two-thirds of Canadians nonetheless believe it has deteriorated over the past decade. This view is consistent with 2019.

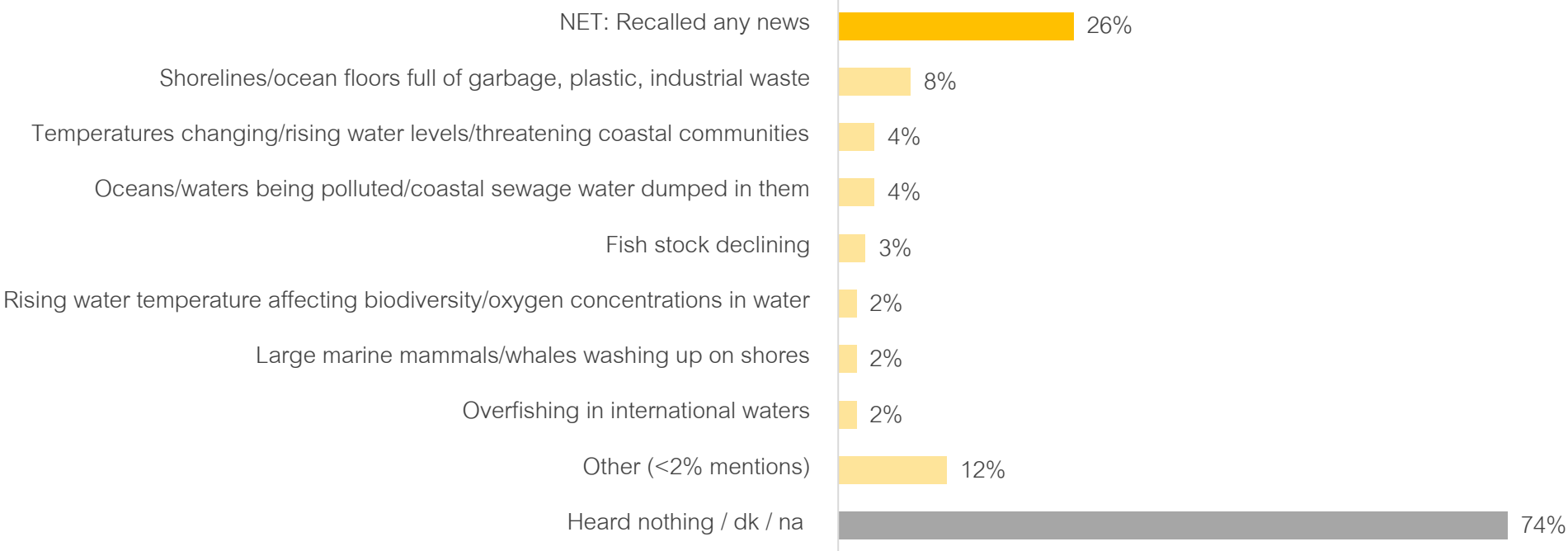
Q1b. Compared to ten years ago, do you think the health of Canada's oceans has improved, become worse or stayed about the same?



# Ocean Health | **Recall recent news about oceans**

Relatively few Canadians recall recent news about Canada’s oceans. In most cases, they are recalling the negative impacts (or outcomes) on the ocean, but not what or who is causing those impacts.

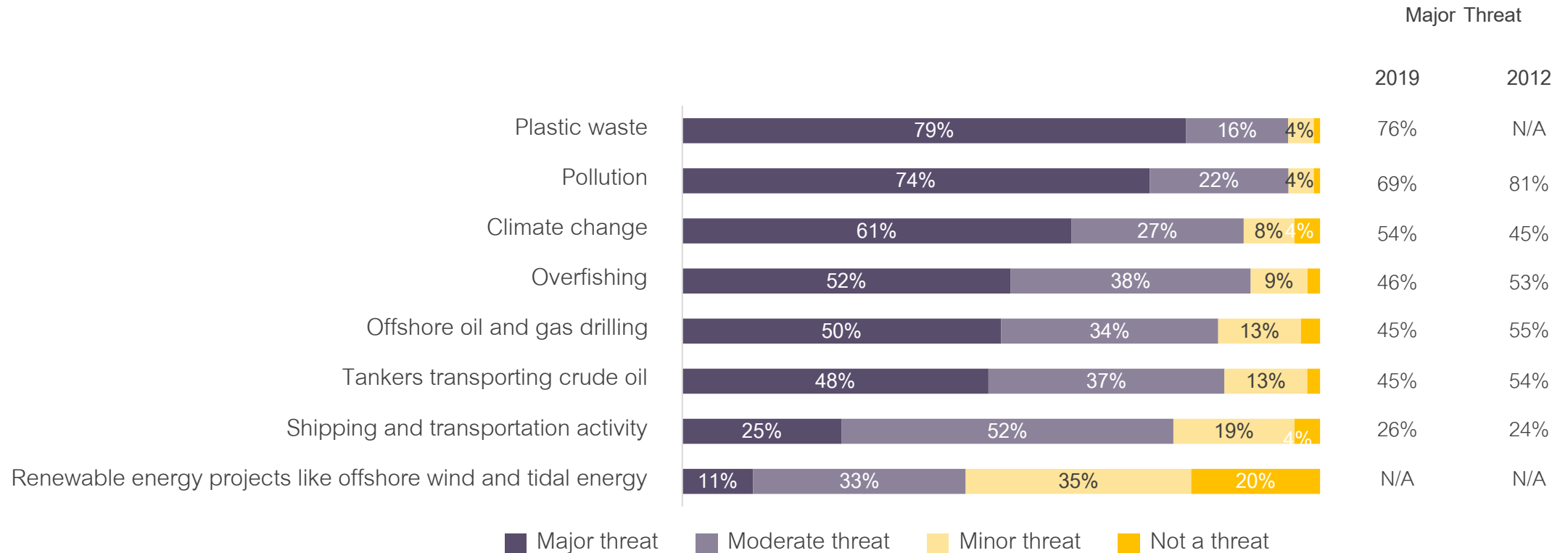
Q3. What news, if any, have you seen, heard or read recently about Canada’s oceans?



# Ocean Health | **Perceived threats to ocean health**

Canadians continue to rank plastic waste as the greatest threat to oceans, consistent with 2019. The perception that climate change is a major threat to ocean health has grown steadily since 2012, and remains ahead of the perceived threat from overfishing, offshore oil & gas, and oil tankers.

Q4. To what extent do you believe each of the following is a threat to the health of Canada's oceans?

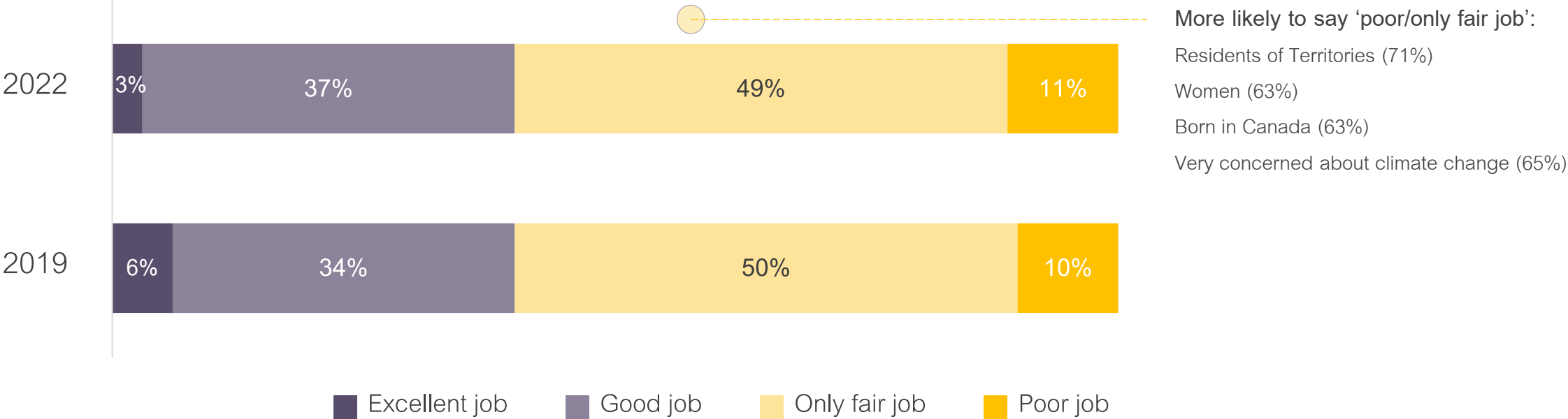


# OCEAN PROTECTION

# Ocean Protection | **Canada's performance**

A steady majority of about six in ten Canadians think Canada is doing an only fair or poor job protecting our oceans, outweighing the four in ten who are more positive. However, most responses are clustered in the middle, suggesting a degree of uncertainty.

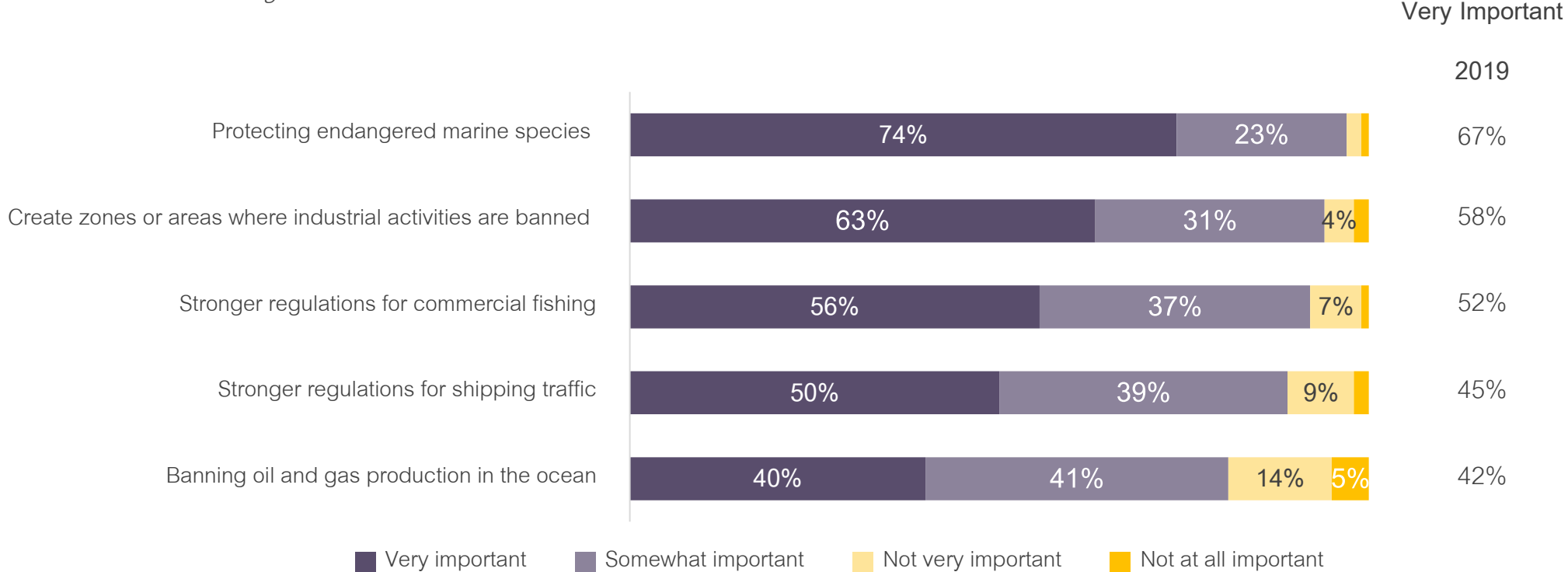
Q5. Overall, how good a job do you think Canada is doing at protecting our oceans?



# Ocean Protection | Importance of potential solutions

Canadians place increasing importance on most of the possible solutions to ocean impacts – including more than six in ten who say it is very important to create zones where industrial activities are banned. The exception is that the relatively lower emphasis on banning oil and gas production remains unchanged.

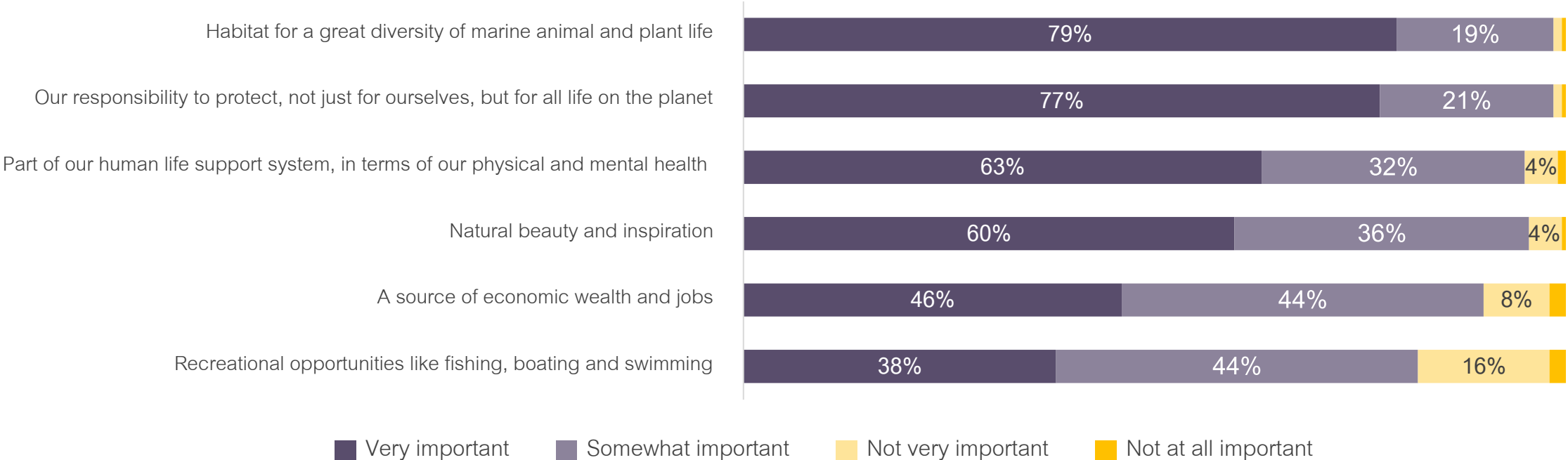
Q6. Among the range of possible things people can do to reduce our impact on oceans and ensure marine life and habitat can recover and thrive, how important do you consider each of the following?



# Ocean Protection | Values associated with the ocean

When asked why it is important to them to protect oceans, the top reasons relate to preserving life and the environment for its own sake. Slightly fewer value oceans for the role they play in supporting human life and providing beauty, and people are least likely to say they value oceans for their economic or recreational benefits.

Q2. There are different types of benefits or things people value about Canada's oceans. How important to you personally are each of the following reasons for protecting the ocean?

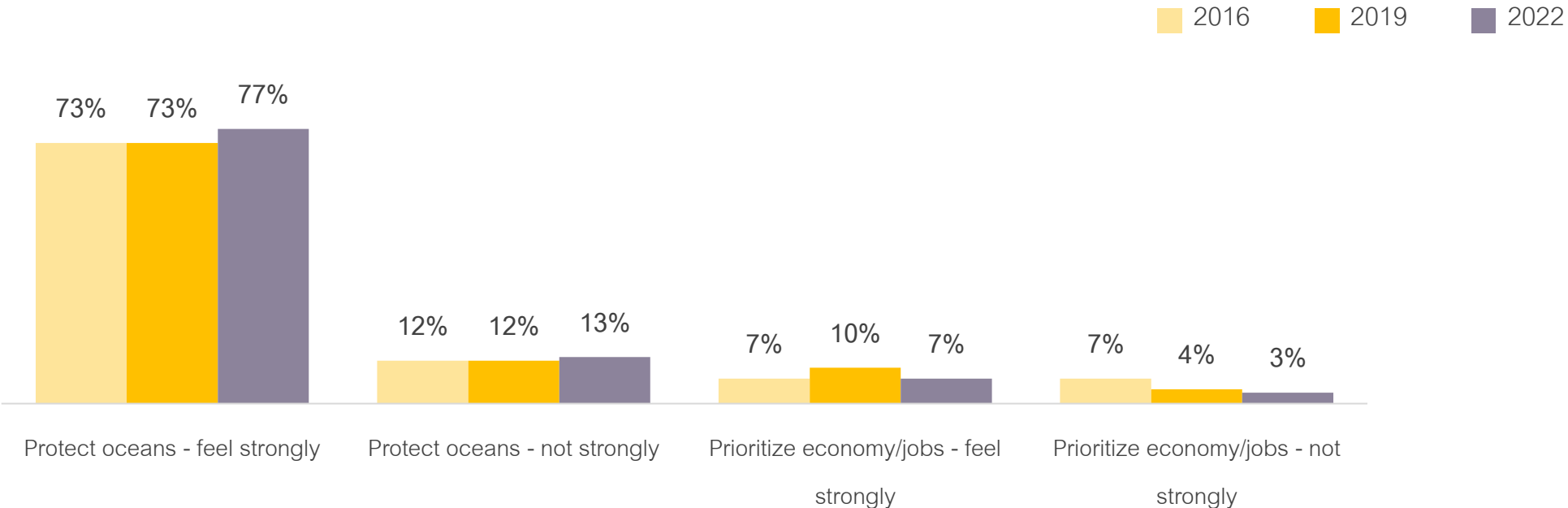




# Ocean Protection | **Prioritize oceans or economy/jobs**

The widespread belief that we should protect oceans to sustain the economy and jobs has solidified further (to 90%, including three in four who feel strongly), with only one in ten who would allow industrial activities in all parts of our oceans.

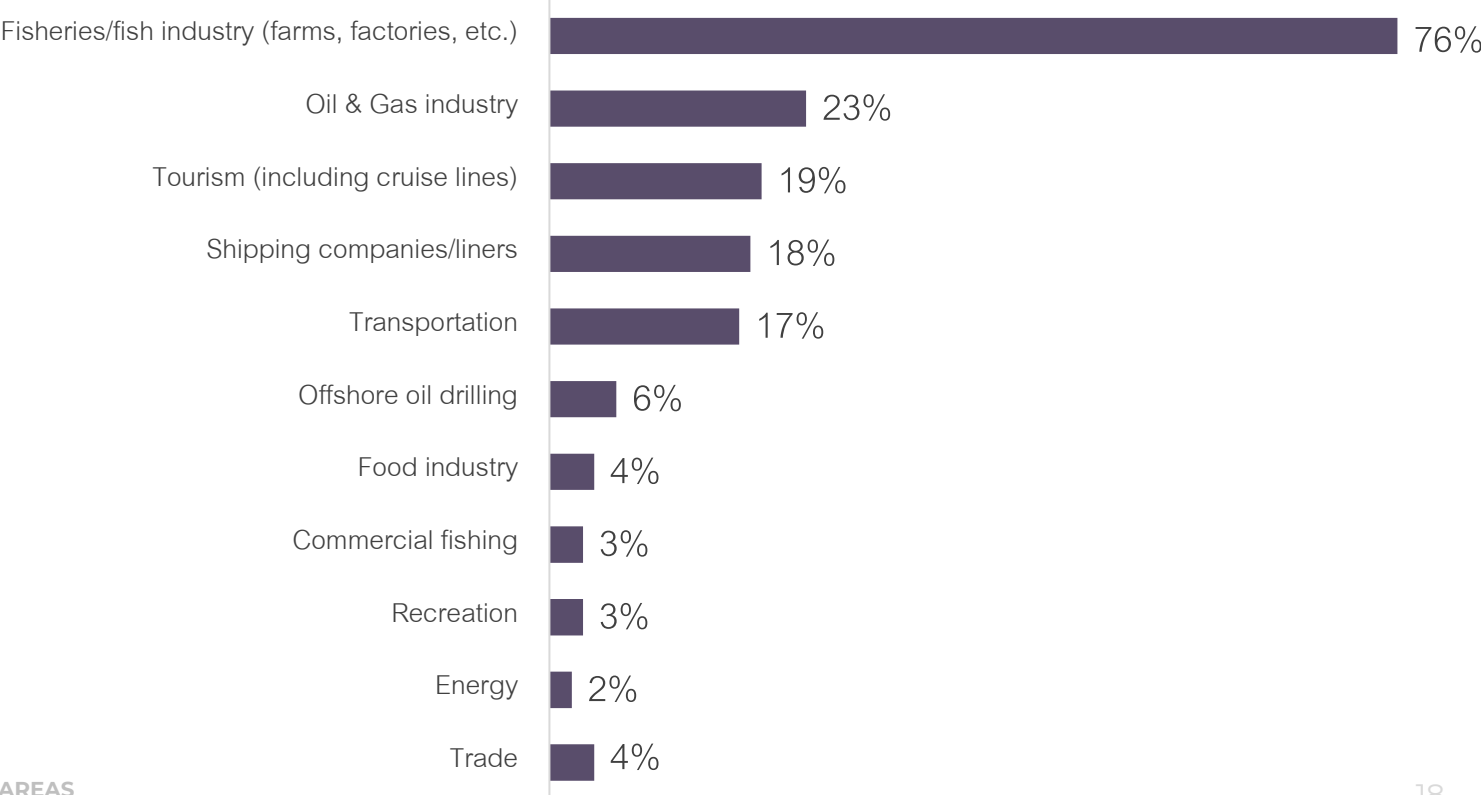
- Q7. Which of these two statements is closer to your own opinion? We need to prioritize the economy and jobs over environmental protection, and allow industrial activities in every part of our oceans OR we need to protect parts of our oceans so they can continue to sustain the economy and jobs in coastal communities?
- Q8. Do you feel strongly or not so strongly that [INSERT Q7 RESPONSE]?



# Ocean Protection | **Industries that depend on oceans**

When asked about industries operating in Canada’s oceans (open-ended, without prompting), seven in ten instinctively think of the fishing industry – suggesting this is likely the typical frame the public uses when thinking about oceans and the economy. By comparison, relatively few mention oil and gas, tourism or shipping/transportation.

Q9. In Canada, when you think about the types of industries or businesses that depend on or operate in Canada’s oceans, what first comes to mind?

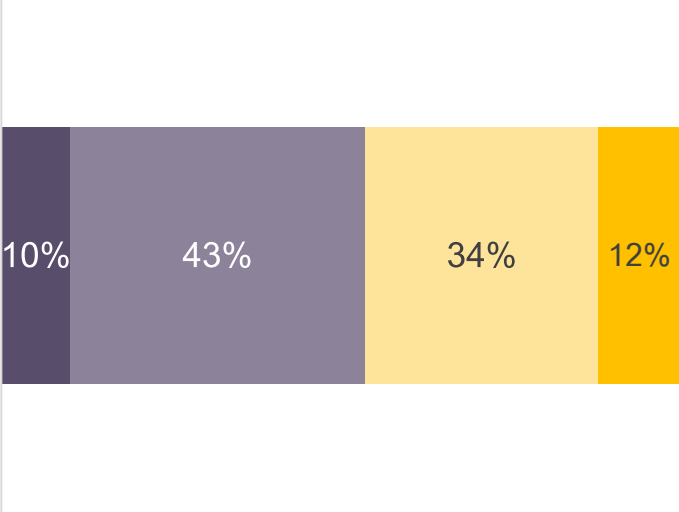


# Ocean Protection | **Are limitations too costly for industry?**

Opinions are mixed about whether industries dependent on oceans can afford further restrictions on their activities in the current economy. Just over half agree industries cannot afford more limitations, while just under half disagree (i.e., industries can afford more limitations). However, only minorities have strong views either way, with views mostly in the middle, indicating a fair degree of uncertainty.

Q22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

In the current economy, industries that depend on or operate in oceans can't afford more limitations placed on what activities take place and where they operate



**Strong agreement higher among:**  
Men (13%)  
Born outside of Canada (15%)  
Not concerned about climate change (19%)  
Consider Canada's ocean health to be excellent (29%)

■ Strongly agree   ■ Somewhat agree   ■ Somewhat disagree   ■ Strongly disagree

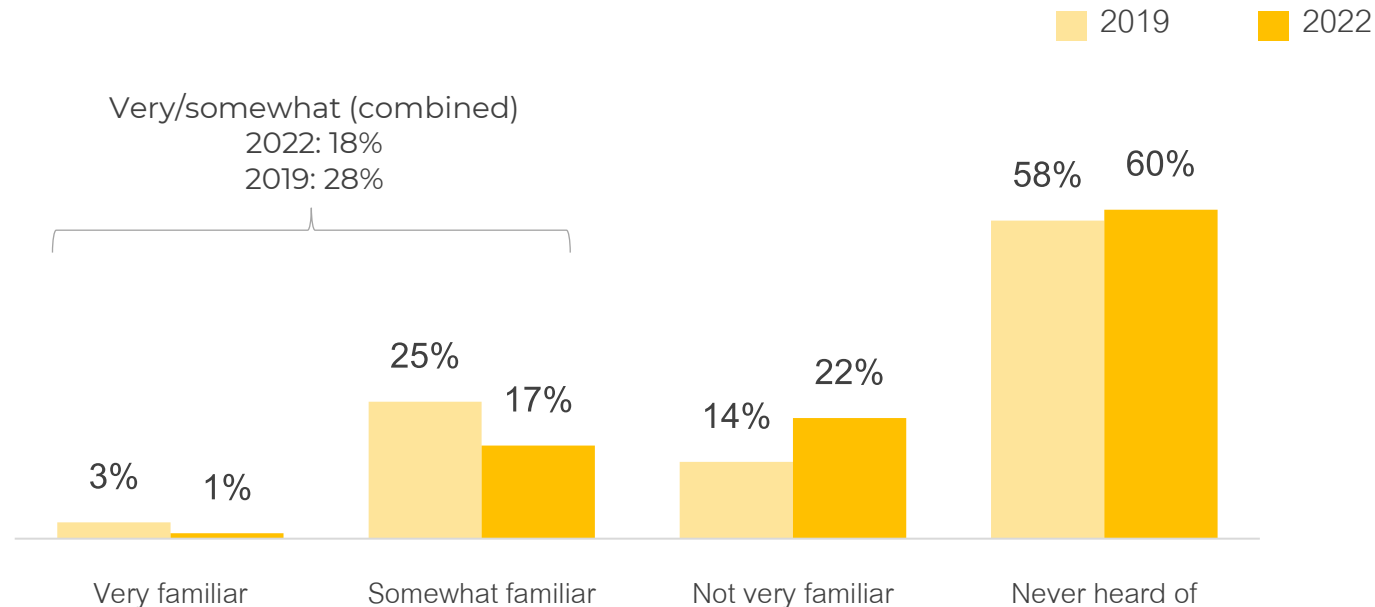
# MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

# Marine Protected Areas | **Awareness and familiarity**

Four in ten Canadians have heard of Marine Protected Areas, which is consistent with 2019. However, the group who are at least somewhat familiar with what MPAs are for and how they are established has declined since 2019.

Q10. Have you ever heard of Marine Protected Areas?

Q.11 How familiar are you with Marine Protected Areas, what they are for and how they are established?

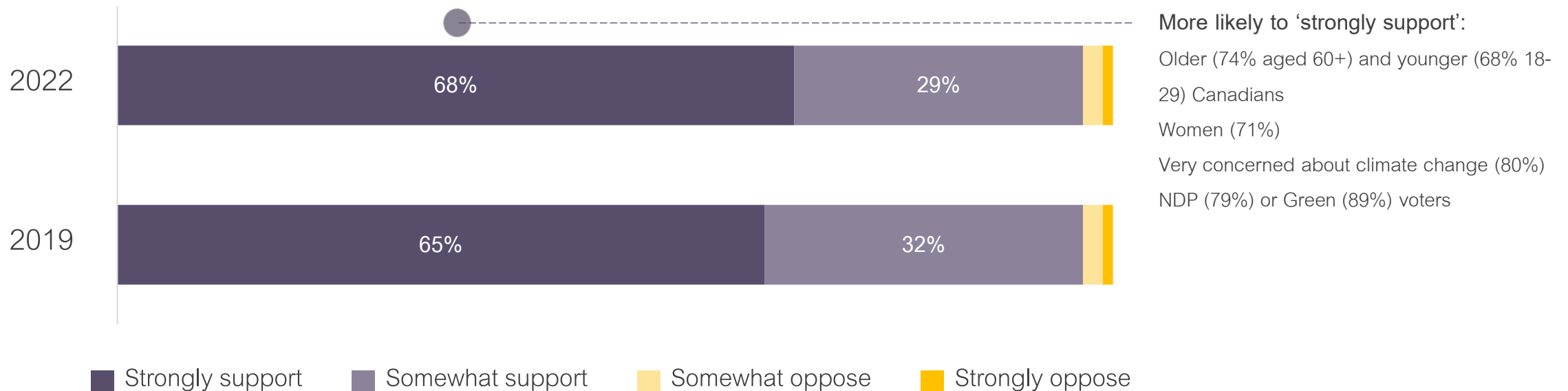


Familiarity with MPAs higher among:  
Residents of Atlantic provinces (33%)  
Men (22%)  
Job dependent on oceans (42%)

# Marine Protected Areas | **Level of support**

There continues to be overwhelming support for MPAs (once explained to respondents), with two-thirds of Canadians who strongly support them.

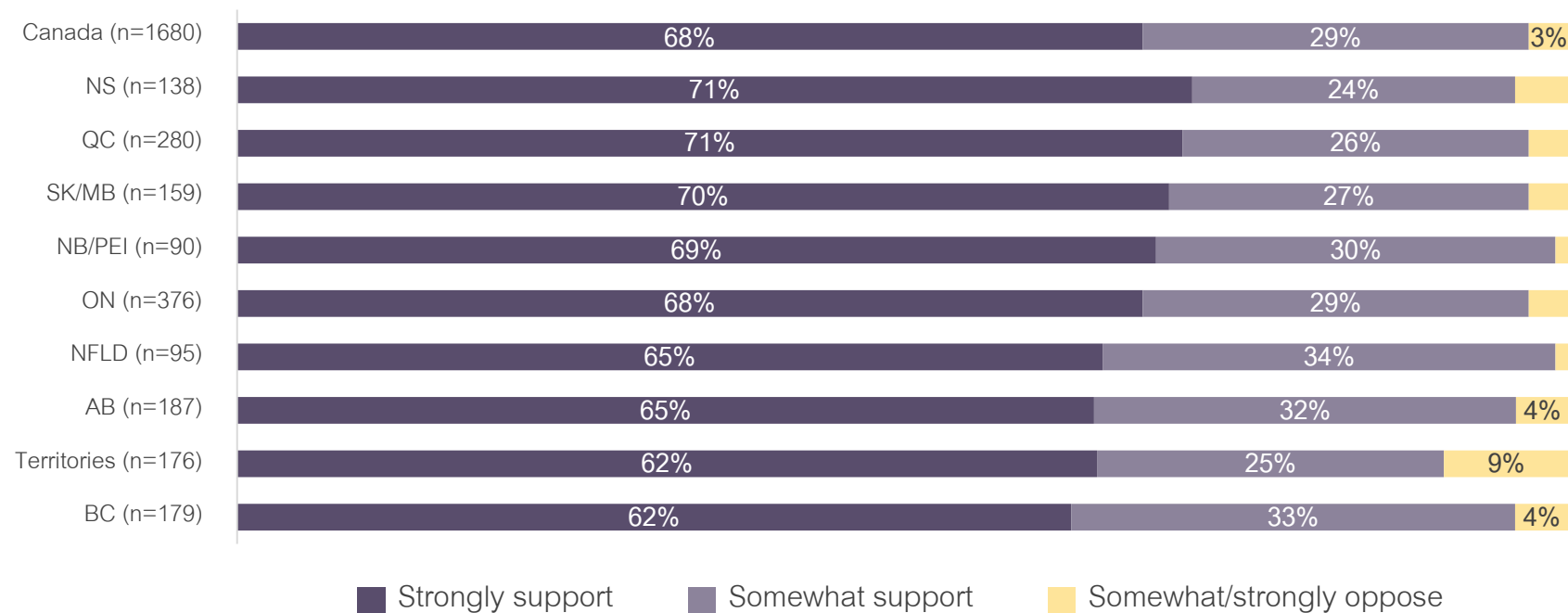
*Q12. A marine protected area or MPA is an area of the ocean where human activities, such as commercial fishing, or oil and gas development, are more strictly regulated than in surrounding waters. MPAs ensure that marine ecosystems remain healthy, by conserving and protecting fish and other marine species and their habitats. Do you support or oppose having certain areas of the ocean within Canadian waters as marine protected areas?*



# Marine Protected Areas | **Level of support – by region**

There is limited variation in support for MPAs across Canada. Majorities of between six and seven in ten in every region strongly support MPAs.

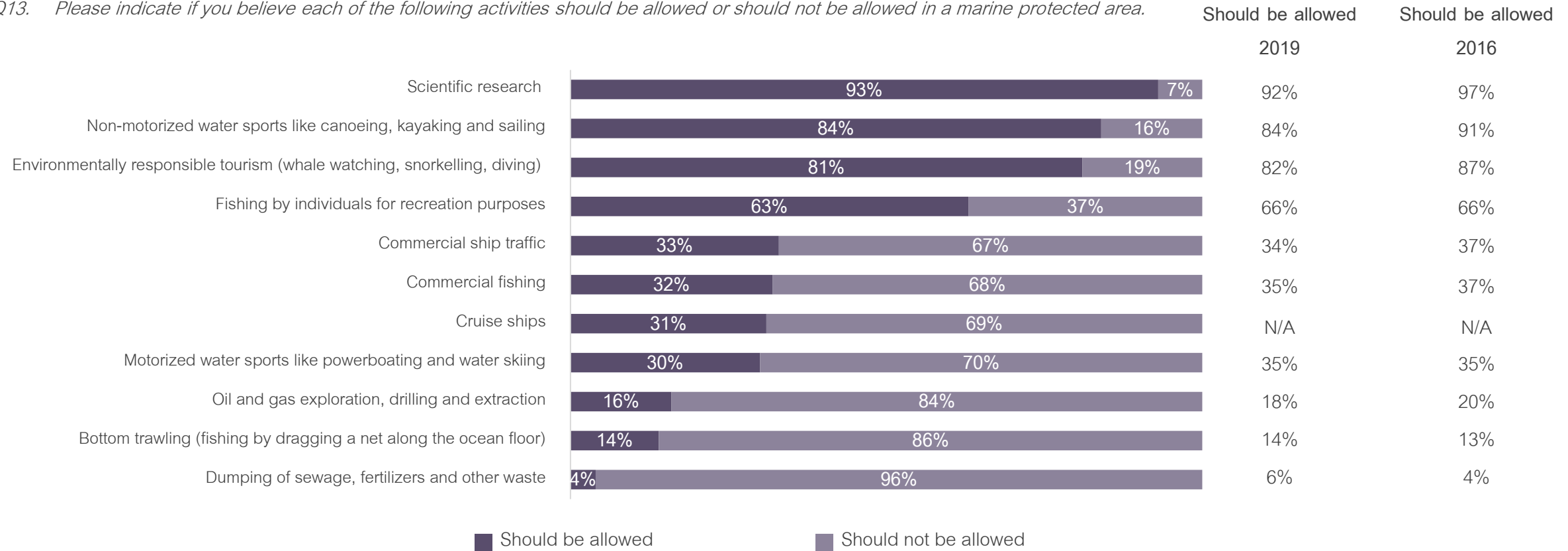
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# Marine Protected Areas | **Acceptable activities in MPAs**

Views about the types of activities considered acceptable or unacceptable within MPAs has remained largely consistent over time. Majorities say research, non-motorized sports, eco-tourism and recreational fishing are acceptable, and the other activities are unacceptable.

Q13. Please indicate if you believe each of the following activities should be allowed or should not be allowed in a marine protected area.

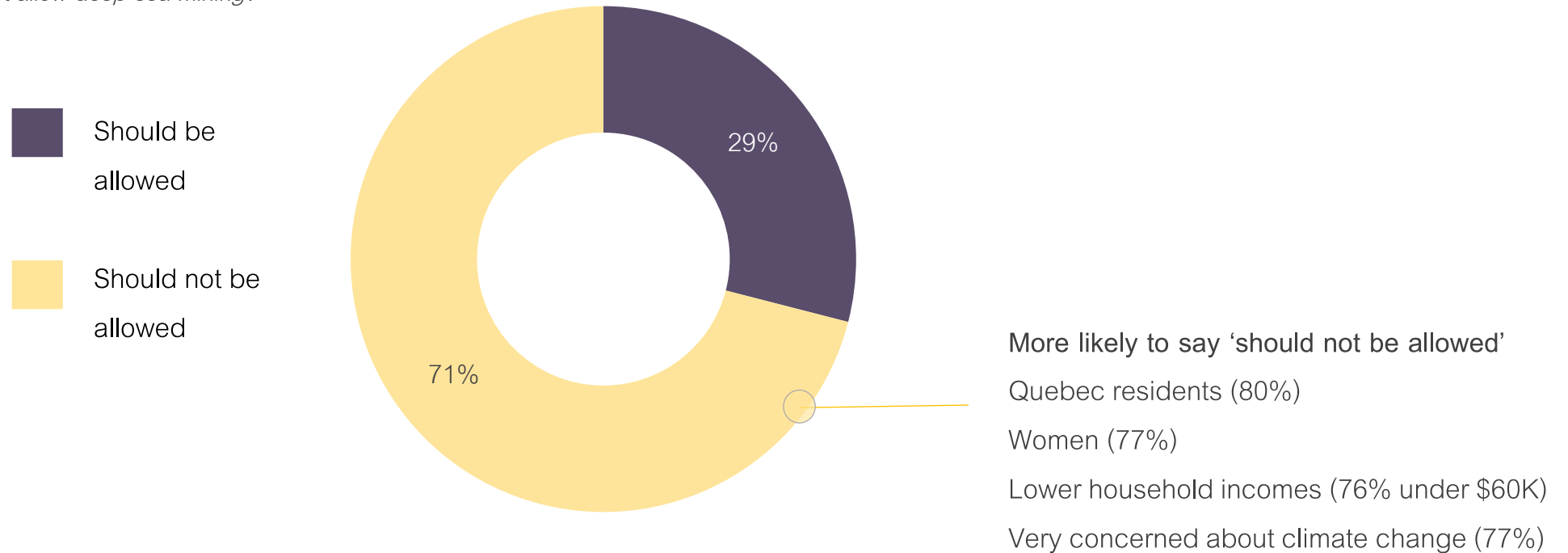




# Deep Sea Mining | **Should or should not be allowed**

The global push for critical minerals has raised concerns about the growth of deep-sea mining, although currently there is none in Canada. When asked, seven in ten Canadians assert that deep-sea mining should not be allowed in Canada.

Q14. *Deep-sea mining is the process of extracting mineral deposits from the ocean floor in deep seas. Currently there is no deep-sea mining in Canada. Do you think Canada should or should not allow deep-sea mining?*

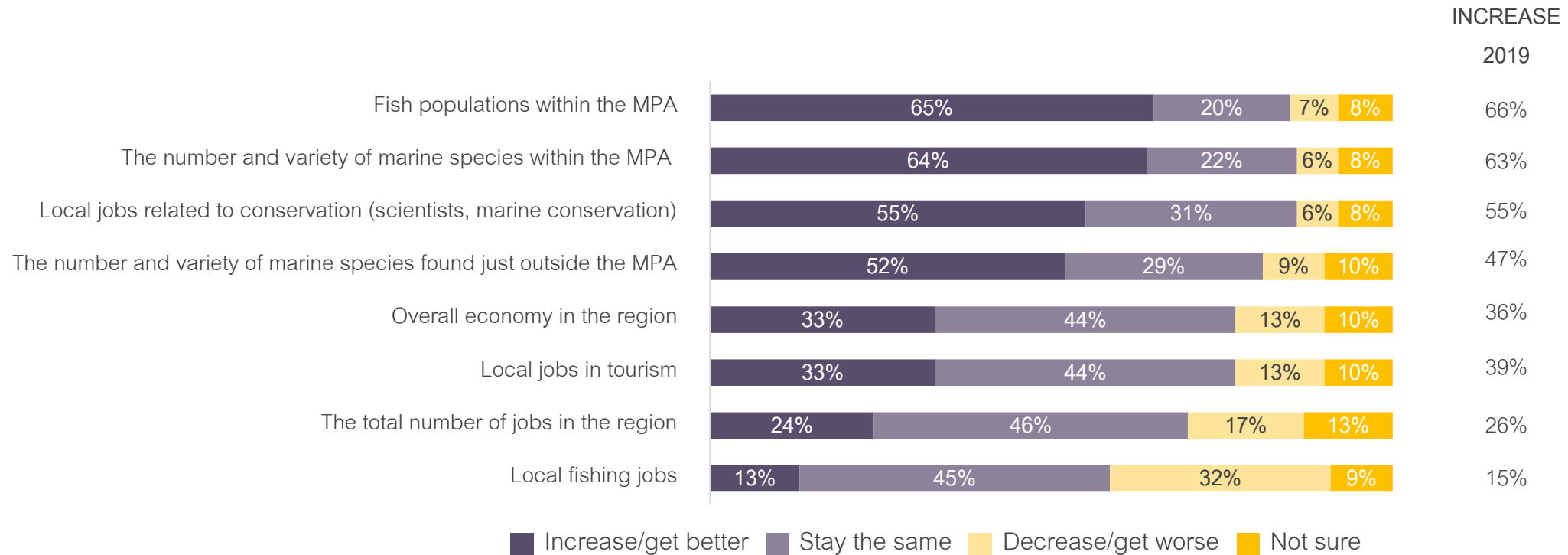


# Marine Protected Areas | Perception of MPA impacts

Similar to 2019, Canadians can visualize the benefits of MPAs to marine species and conservation jobs. Differences of opinion remain about other impacts, such as to the regional economy and number of jobs. The only place where a plurality foresee a negative impact is on local fishing jobs (32% say these will decrease, consistent with 2019).

Q15. Do you think each of the following is likely to increase, stay the same or decrease when a new marine protected area (MPA) is created?

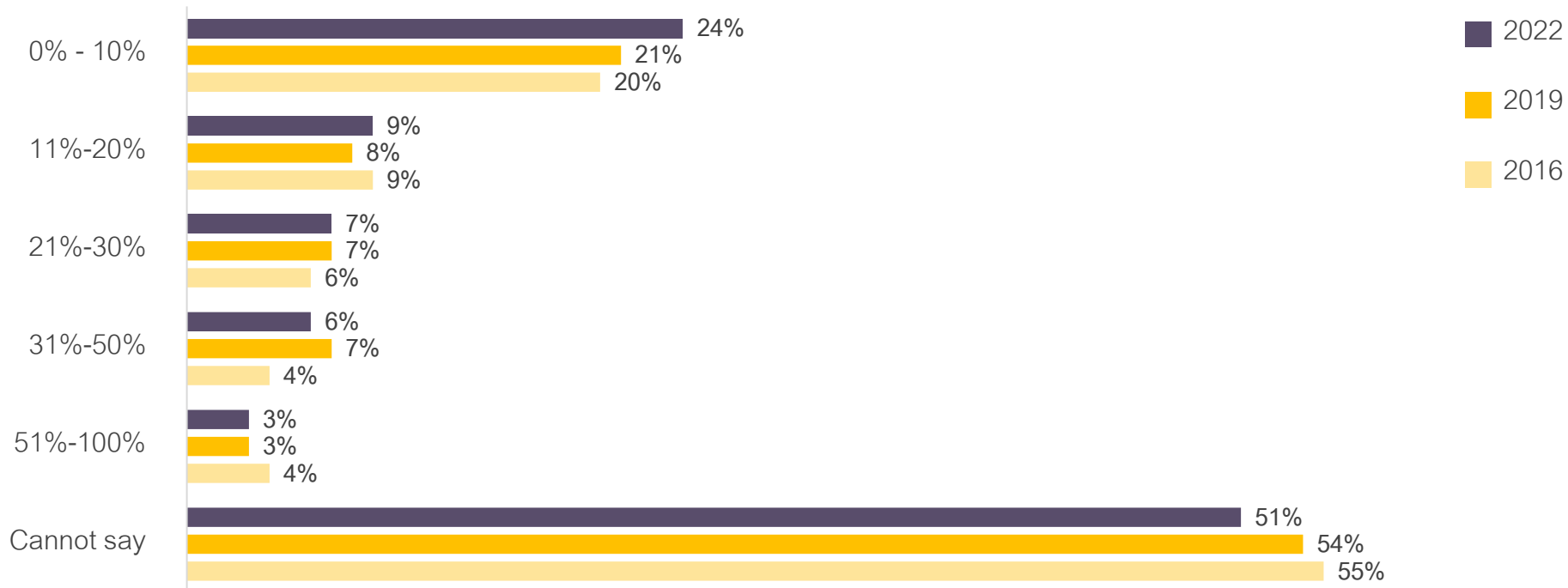
Q16. And do you think the overall economy in the region is likely to get better, get worse or stay the same when a new marine protected area is created?



# Marine Protected Areas | Perception of current protection

There continues to be limited knowledge of how much of Canada's oceans are protected as MPAs. As before, the largest group Canadians cannot venture a guess; only one in ten put the number within the correct range (11-20%).

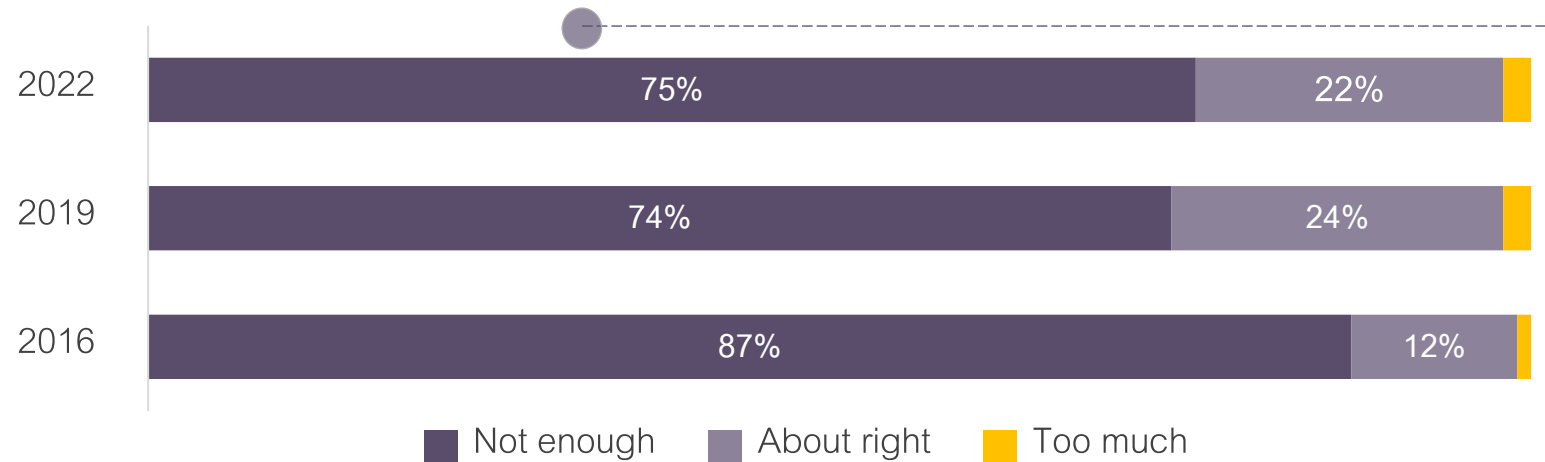
Q17. What percentage of Canada's oceans do you think are currently protected as marine protected areas?



# Marine Protected Areas | **Is protected amount sufficient?**

Even as the amount of protected areas has grown from about eight percent of oceans in 2019 to fifteen percent currently, the view that this is insufficient continues to be held by three in four Canadians.

Q18. *Currently, just under fifteen percent [ASKED IN 2019: just under eight percent / ASKED IN 2016: around one percent] of Canada's oceans are subject to special protection by law that limits the types of activities allowed. Do you think this amount of protected area is too much, about right, or not enough?*



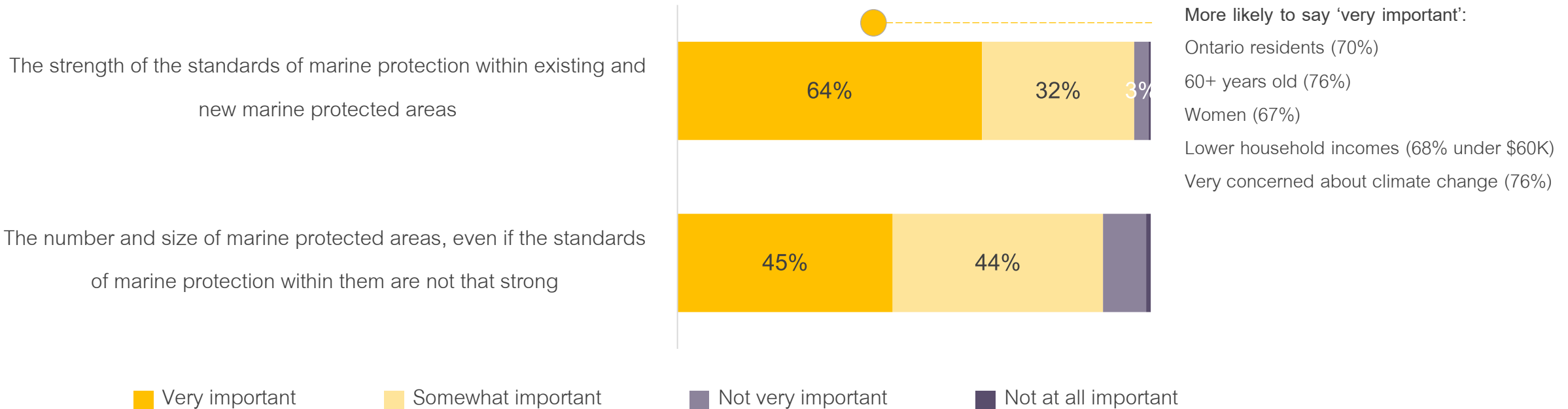
#### More likely to say 'not enough':

- Women (82%)
- College degree or less (77%)
- Earning a household income of <\$40k (81%)
- Born in Canada (78%)
- Very concerned about climate change (83%)
- Not very familiar with MPAs (84%)

# Marine Protected Areas | **Importance of number vs standards**

Most Canadians say it is important to consider number & size of MPAs and the strength of standards within MPAs but place greater emphasis on the latter over the former.

Q21. In your view, how important are each of the following for Canada to consider when creating new marine protected areas?

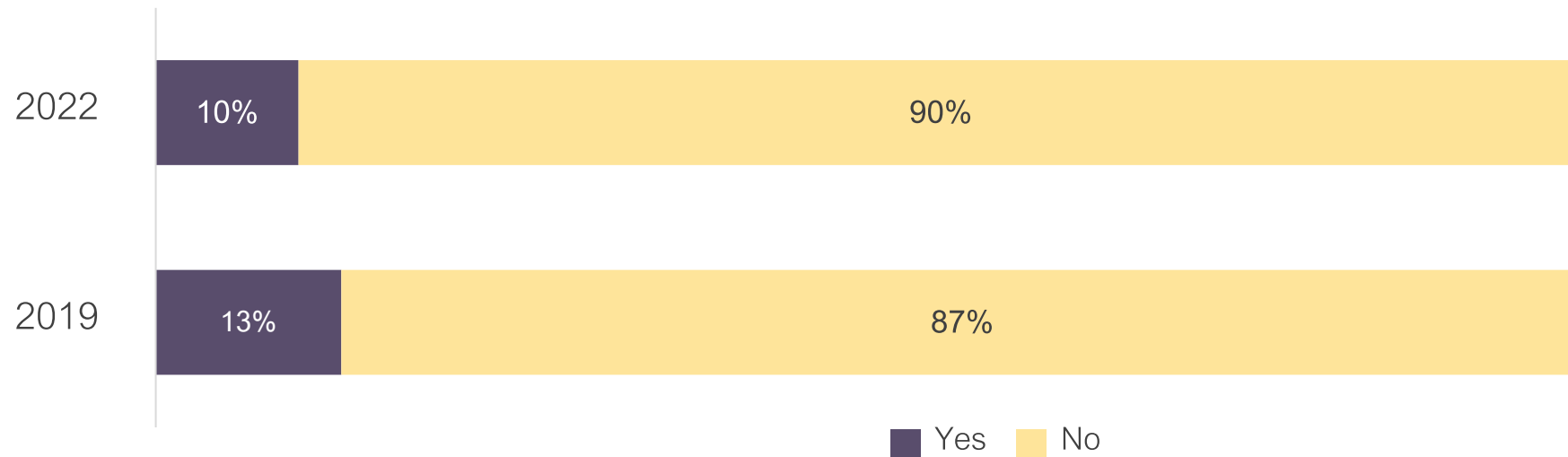


# 30% OCEAN PROTECTION BY 2030

# 30 by 30 | **Awareness of 30 by 30 target**

As before, there continues to be very limited awareness of the federal government's stated commitment to protect oceans.

Q19. *The federal government has made an international commitment to increase the amount of Canada's protected marine and coastal areas to 30 percent by 2030 [ASKED IN 2019: 10 percent by 2020]. Before today, were you aware of this commitment?*

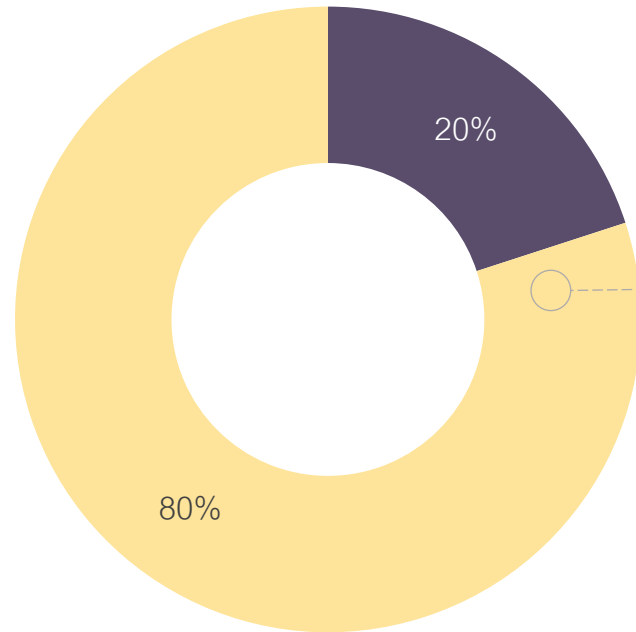


# 30 by 30 | Urgency to meet 30 by 30 target

Regardless of whether or not they are aware of the commitment to protect 30 percent of oceans by 2030, eight in ten say it is critical Canada meets this target, compared to two in ten who say there is still plenty of time to protect oceans.

Q20. Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion?

-  Protecting the ocean is important, but we will still have plenty of time if Canada misses its target of 30% protection by 2030.
-  Protecting the ocean is important, and it is critical that Canada meets its target of 30% protection by 2030.



More likely to say 'critical to meet target':

- Quebec (86%) and Ontario (83%)
- Women (86%)
- Lower household incomes (82% under \$60k)
- Very concerned about climate change (90%)
- Rate Canada's ocean health only fair/poor (88%)
- Strongly support MPAs (89%)

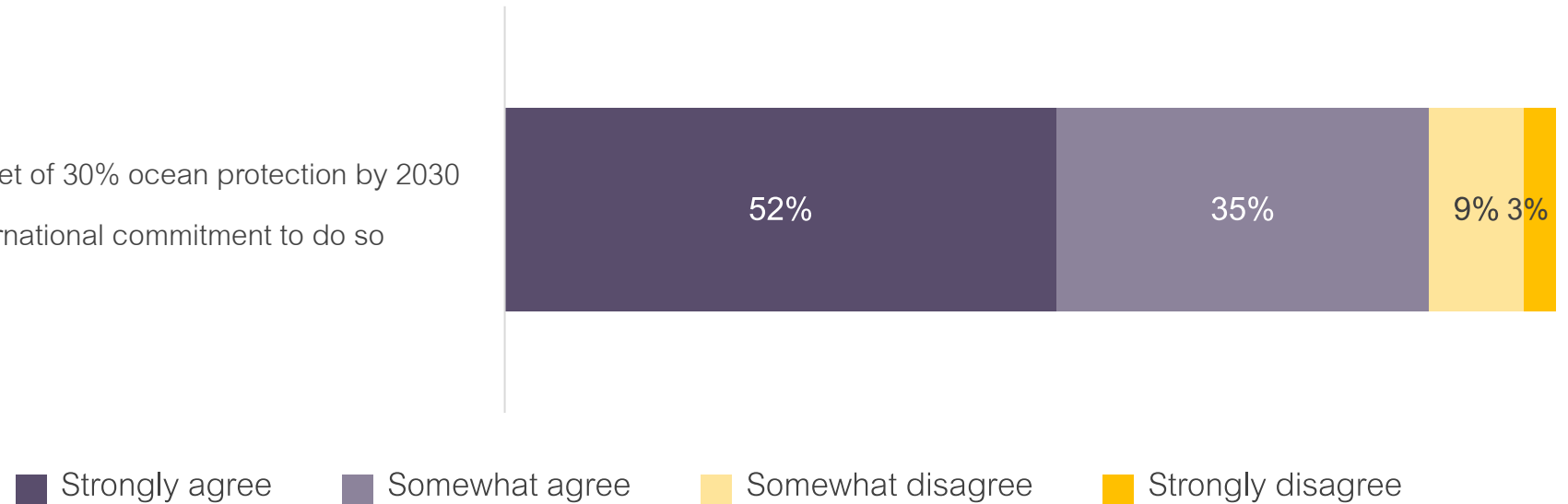


# 30 by 30 | Importance of international commitment

There is widespread agreement (including half who strongly agree) that Canada should meet its target of 30% by 2030 because it made an international commitment to do so. This suggests that support is not just about the target itself, but about the importance of following through on an existing commitment.

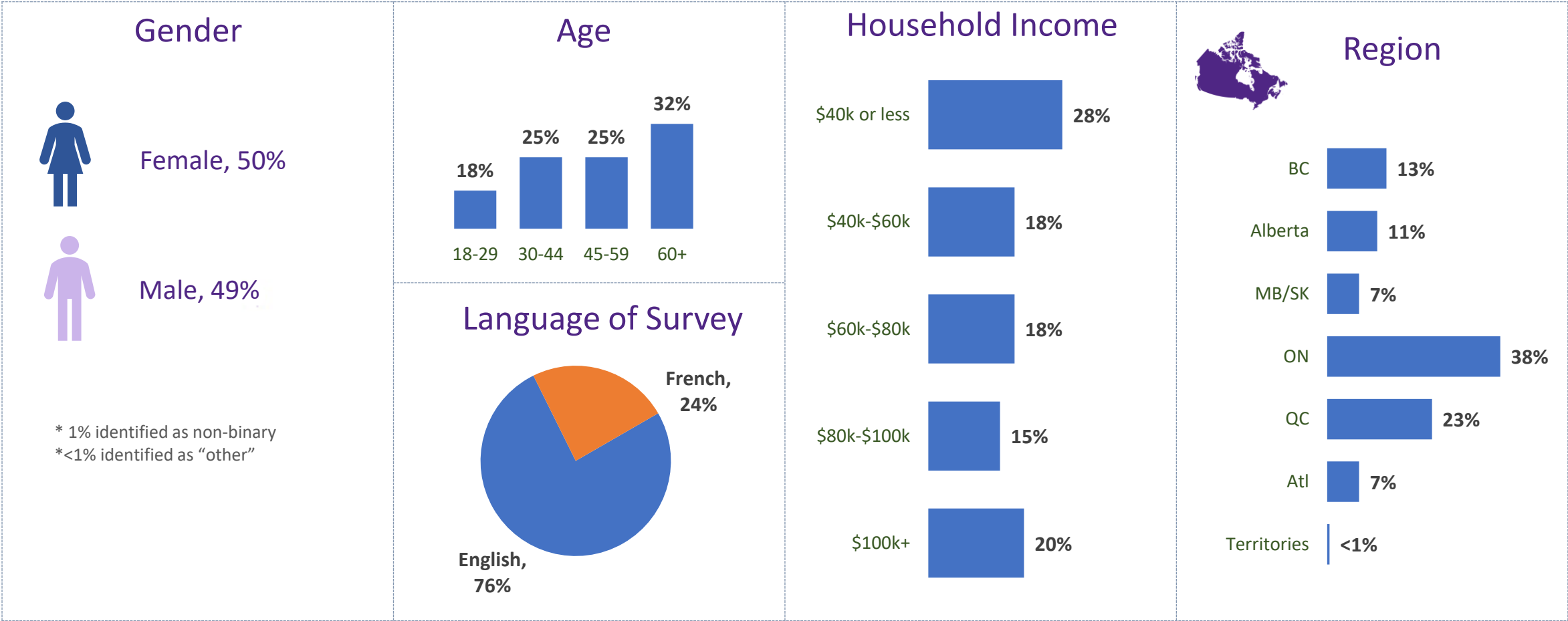
Q22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Canada needs to meet its target of 30% ocean protection by 2030 because it made an international commitment to do so

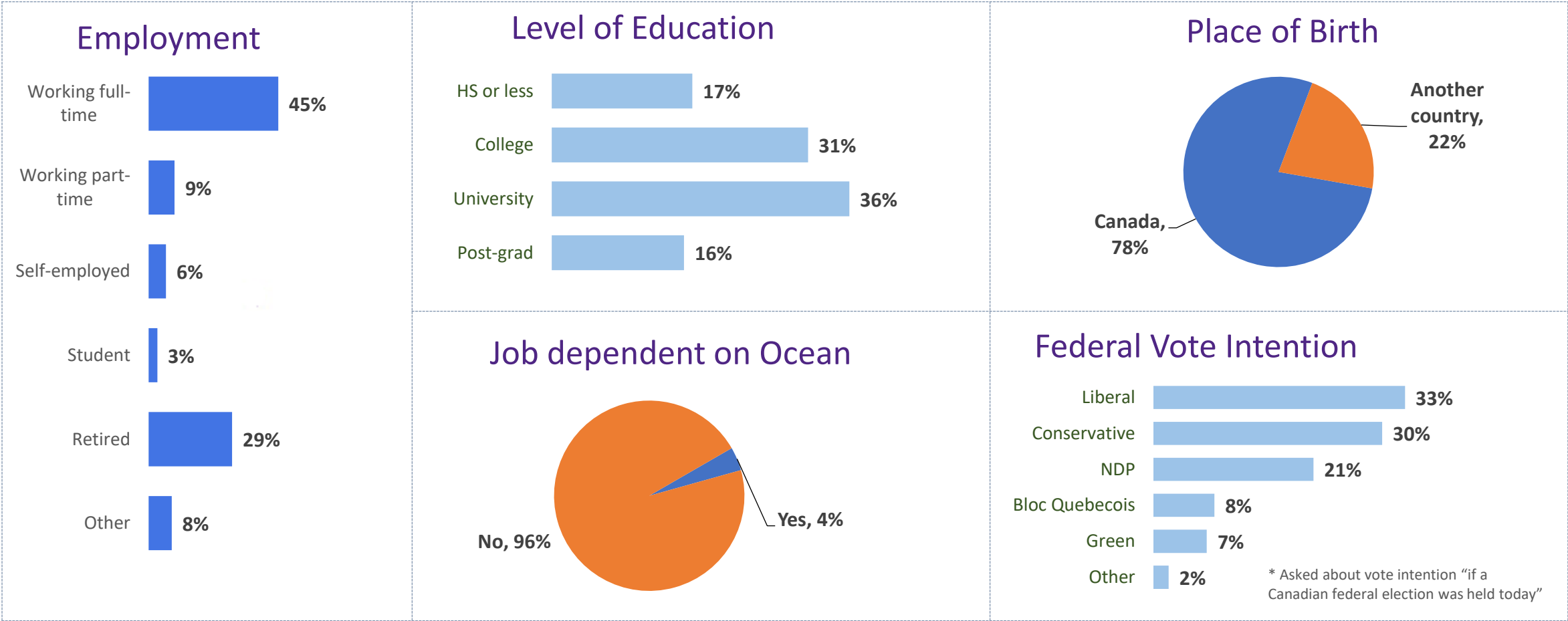


# RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

# WEIGHTED SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS



# WEIGHTED SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS



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# Thank you.

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