

2024 Ballarat state of Cyber Security Report



April 2024

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Ballarat and the 2023-2030 Australian Cyber Security Strategy

The 2023-2030 Australian Cyber Security Strategy released in November 2023 by the Minister for Cyber Security outlines a roadmap to position Australia as a global leader in cyber security by 2030. Within the strategy are several lessons to be learnt and opportunities in cyber security for regional cities such as Ballarat. A selection of some of the strategy key points include the following:

- Australia is an attractive target for cyber criminals
- Cyber security presents rich opportunities for Australia
- Australia to build a world-class threat sharing and blocking
- By 2030, Australia will be a world leader in cyber security

For regional cities, each of the facts and ambitions above need to be carefully considered to extract relevant and useful insights that help their local business build preparedness plans and invest in the appropriate cyber technologies. Strategic ambitions such as the pledge for Australia to be a world leader in Cyber security by 2030 and to build a world class threat sharing capability in the short term should also be useful inputs in both short- and long-term planning for the future of the regional city in a digital era. Such insights may help energise efforts to position Ballarat as a Cyber security centre of excellence which contributes significantly to Australia's world cyber leadership aspiration.



Objectives of the Ballarat Cyber security survey

The annual Ballarat Cyber security survey is a collaboration between Federation university and technology company Aiculus. The survey is viewed as the first-step towards building a stronger, collaborative and impactful cyber security ecosystem which will directly participate in the security and resilience of Ballarat and surrounding businesses.

It is anticipated that through the survey, useful insights will be drawn regarding general awareness and perceived preparedness of local businesses to cyber threats. The 2024 Ballarat Cyber security survey also seeks to uncover the level of cyber security concern among businesses and obstacles faced by these businesses in setting up or advancing cyber security capability.

Designed to be an annual event, the goal is to incrementally build a platform for knowledge sharing and, in the process build a useful knowledgebase of local cyber security context. Over time, this context will be essential in planning practical, and cost-effective cyber security initiatives for the city and the surrounding towns.

The knowledge sharing platform and knowledgebase will also help individual organisations as they start or mature their cyber security capabilities.

Finally, given the cost of cyber security tools and expertise, there is strong justification for Ballarat to leverage the growing economic opportunities in cyber security and be a cyber security centre of excellence.

2024 survey questions

The 2024 survey asked Ballarat and surrounding businesses and organisations the following questions:

Question 1: Size of your organisation with options ranging between 1-10 people to 200 or more employees.

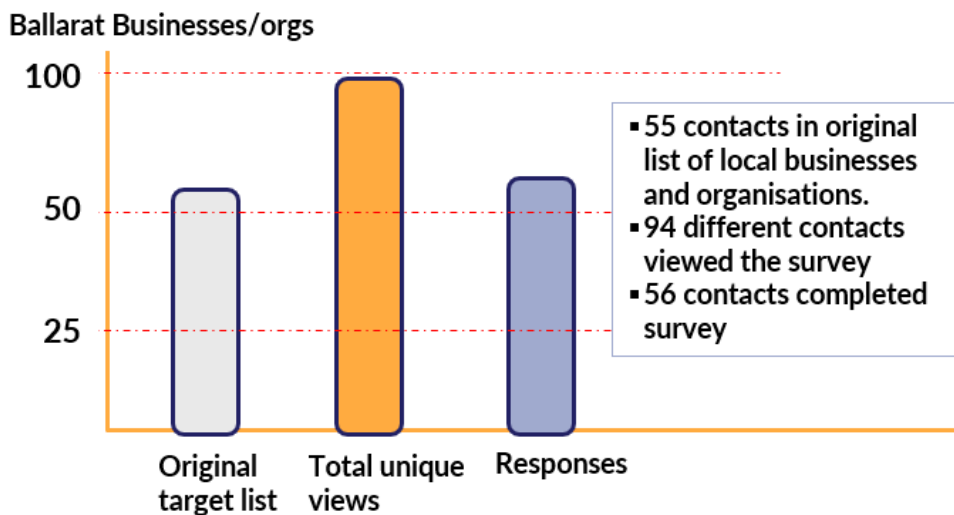
Question 2: Your organization's level of cyber security readiness and preparedness with options from an organisation with comprehensive cyber security policies and procedures to an organisation that is unsure of their own readiness or preparedness to cyber security threats.

Question 3: Top-2 reasons stopping your organisation from doing more to boost your cyber security preparedness or maturity. Options included cost, access to cyber security expertise, not sure.

Question 4: On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your organisation's level of concern regarding cyber security threats and risks.

Survey distribution and response-rate

Survey distribution and response overview

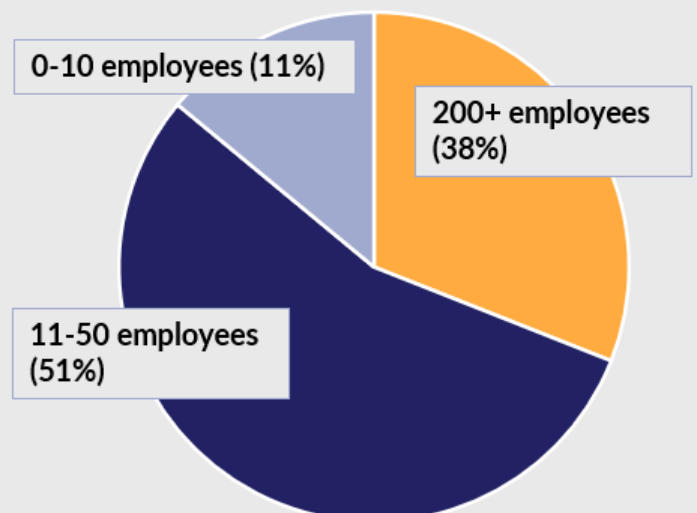


56 people completed the survey from a total of 94 different contacts who viewed it. For a first survey of this nature, a response rate of 59% is a good start and the insights shared by the respondents are worth sharing. Some of the notable local businesses and organisations who responded to the survey included the city council, the university, main hospital, community bank and multiple small businesses.

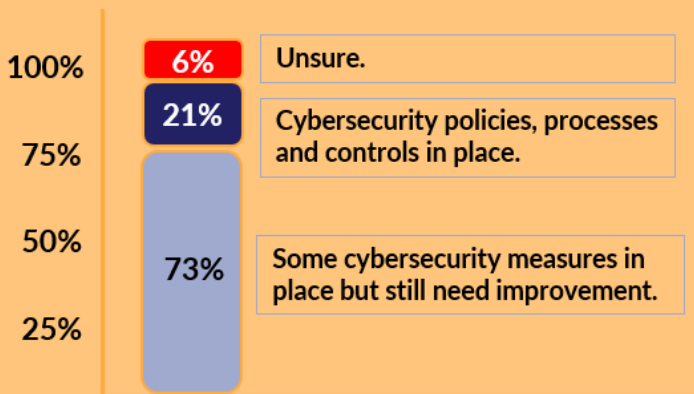
Question 1: Size of your organisation

More than half of the respondents were from organisations with over 10 and under 50 employees. This is the equivalent representation of the Ballarat business landscape. It was also great to have the views of larger Ballarat organisations including the Ballarat Base hospital, Federation University and Community Bank Buninyong.

Survey participation by organisational size

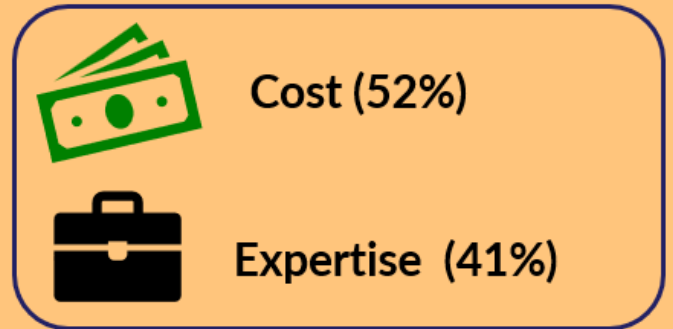


Question 2: Level of cyber security readiness: Top 3 views



Almost a quarter of the respondents indicated that some cyber security measures are in place in their organisations, with some improvements still needed. This is true for most organisations of all sizes even beyond Ballarat. It's also encouraging to see that a fifth of the respondents thought that their organisations had a comprehensive set of policies, user awareness and technical controls in place to manage their cyber security risks.

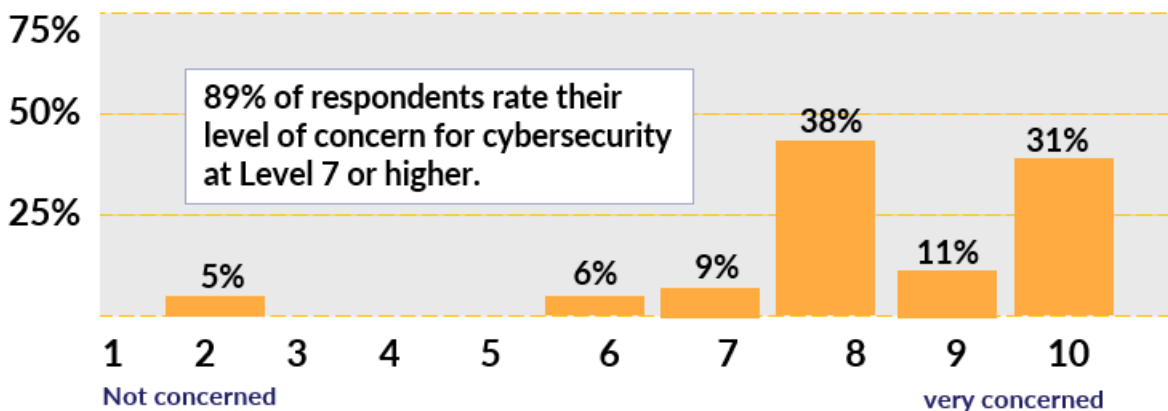
Question 3: Top-2 reasons why your organisation is not doing more to boost cyber security preparedness.



The top two reasons why Ballarat organisations are not doing more to set-up or mature their cyber security capabilities are cost and access to cyber expertise. Although these reasons are not unique to Ballarat organisations, it's great to see that executives and senior leaders of local businesses understand that cyber security requires financial investment and appropriately skilled and qualified people to provide real value.

Question 4: Level of concern regarding cyber security threats and risks.

Organisations' level of concern regarding cyber security threats and risks



The fact that 5% of the respondents selected a low level of concern for cyber security threats reflects the confidence and possibly the investments that some of the local organisations have made in bolstering their cyber security capability. However, 89% of respondents rate their level of concern for cyber security threats at Level 7 or higher. This is more in line with national and global trends.

BALLARAT CYBER CENTRE

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Conclusion

This was the first time a survey focusing on cyber security was circulated among Ballarat businesses and other organisations. A certain level of nervousness was expected from the intended survey respondents. This is mostly because cyber security is a sensitive topic and some level of discretion is required when disclosing an organisation's cyber security stack or broader security initiatives. On the other hand, a collective cyber resilience and a thriving ecosystem of secure businesses can only materialise if a trust-based and accountable information sharing is in place.

As Australia shapes up to have a world class world-class threat sharing and blocking capabilities, information exchange platforms including cluster surveys will provide the building blocks for this national ambition.

Looking forward, Aiculus and Federation University intend for the Ballarat Cyber security survey to be an annual feature of the Ballarat and surrounding business community and to incrementally build a cyber security information sharing platform that will contribute to the city and the local businesses' resilience.

About Aiculus

Aiculus is a Ballarat technology company that specialises in Cyber security and AI. Aiculus has proprietary technology products in API Security and provides consultancy services in Cyber security and AI. Aiculus was a finalist in the 2023 Fed Uni Commerce Ballarat Business Excellence Awards in the Innovation category. Contact contact@aiculus.co for more information.