Biodiversity 2037 Victorians Value Nature

Foundations Survey Summary





Monash Sustainable Development Institute

BehaviourWorks



Environment, Land, Water and Planning

A key goal of Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037 is having all Victorians valuing nature.

Victorians are passionate about the environment and everyone has a role to play in conserving our biodiversity. To achieve this goal, Biodiversity 2037 has multiple priorities including raising the awareness of the natural environment in the community and creating opportunities for people to connect with, and protect, nature.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), in collaboration with BehaviourWorks Australia, conducted the state-wide Victorians Valuing Nature (VVN) Foundations Survey to understand the Victorian public's level of connection to nature, awareness of biodiversity and the levels of pro-environmental behaviour undertaken.

The survey also aimed to identify the barriers that people face connecting with nature and acting to protect it, and inform where DELWP and partners should invest resources, including the types of behaviour-change programs and awareness raising campaigns that might be pursued or supported in the future.

Survey Development

The VVN Foundations Survey was developed following a targeted literature review¹ canvassing international and local studies measuring connection with nature, biodiversity awareness and behaviours to protect the natural environment. Insights from key industry stakeholders, including input from science experts from the University of Tasmania and RMIT University were also sought. The project team conducted workshops with a range of practitioners (e.g. DELWP, Department of Health and Human Services, Zoos Victoria, Outdoors Victoria, Royal Botanic Gardens, Parks Victoria, Victorian National Parks Association and City of Melbourne) to maximise utility and relevance of the data.

The survey covered five broad topics:

- Nature connection a multi-dimensional scale² to measure connection to nature across Identity,
 Attachment, Materialism, Experience, and Spirituality.
- 2. Environmental values a three-dimensional scale³ to measure environmental concern across egoistic (concern for me), altruistic (concern for all people), and biospheric (concern for the environment).
- Engagement behaviours frequency of time spent in nature, frequency of visiting different types
 of places or engaging with nature indirectly, visitation reasons and barriers to spending time in nature.
- Biodiversity knowledge rating of the health of the natural environment, understanding of the importance of a healthy environment and understanding the threats to biodiversity.
- Pro-environmental behaviours frequency of participation in activities which protect
 biodiversity, likelihood and barriers of future uptake, and perceived impact of behaviours.

Methodology

The survey was developed by BehaviourWorks Australia and tested with a focus group to ensure the survey made sense to respondents. Data was collected through an online panel led by the Online Research Unit (theoru.com) in October 2018 in accordance with Monash University Ethics approval (14010). Respondents were invited to participate if they were over 18. To ensure representation of the Victorian adult population, further sampling was required for males over the age of 18.

Report citation

⁴Meis-Harris, J., Saeri, A., Boulet, M., Borg, K., Faulkner, N., and Jorgensen, B. (2019). Victorians Value Nature – Survey Results. Melbourne, Australia: BehaviourWorks Australia, Monash University.

Respondent profile

The sample was representative of the broader Victorian population in terms of gender, age, metro (Melbourne) and regional (rest of Victoria) residents according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents (n = 3090).



Key results

We surveyed 3090 Victorians from all walks of life and found;



support pro-environmental values (supporting statements like "protecting the environment" as guiding principles in their lives). This was consistent across metro and regional areas.

of parents believe it is important that their children spend time in nature

Victorians...

- with higher levels of connection to nature are more likely to take up environmental action and have pro-environmental values,
- who spend more time in nature feel more strongly connected to nature,
- feel strongly connected to their own gardens (for those that have them),

- feel a very strong spiritual sense of connectedness to nature,
- feel more strongly connected to unmodified nature (National Parks and beaches) compared with more modified landscapes.

By promoting activities that enhance people's connection with nature we aim to increase the frequency with which people act to protect the environment and therefore improve the future of Victoria's unique biodiversity.

Nature connectedness is a multidimensional concept, and while further work is needed to determine how different dimensions can be used, this survey provides useful starting point for increasing Victorians' engagement and connectedness with nature. DELWP and its partners are well placed to use a diverse range of approaches to help connect people with nature. These approaches could include improving opportunities to experience nature, addressing perceived barriers, awareness raising and focussing on place and the values of local natural areas^{4, p71-72}.

We recognise that in many cases reaching these goals will be about supporting and enhancing what already exists, identifying and filling gaps, and in adjusting traditional approaches to maximise our effectiveness and reach⁵.

Pro-environmental behaviours

We asked Victorians how frequently they engaged in a range of pro-environmental behaviours (see Figure 1), from choosing public transport to acting to take care of the environment, in the past year.

These 11 behaviours were chosen from a broader list, developed by internal stakeholders who were asked to rank behaviours according to their impact on biodiversity, and their feasibility from a behaviour-change perspective.



The likelihood that Victorians will take up pro-environmental behaviours in the future is predicted by having a high connection with nature and high environmental awareness. Having a high feeling of connection to highly modified natural places (gardens, urban parks) was another strong predictor.

A key barrier to environmental volunteering, collecting scientific information (e.g. via citizen science) and environmental advocacy is the belief that the action will have little impact (self-efficacy).

Although two thirds of Victorians have engaged in a positive environmental behaviour, we know there is more we need to do to address the current state of biodiversity loss.

Broadly speaking, improving or raising people's connection to nature, coupled with an improved environmental awareness, are primary ways to increase the number of people who act to protect the environment - including volunteering.

The importance of highly-modified natural places such as zoos, gardens and urban parks

for promoting connection to nature and increasing pro-environmental action is also an important finding for DELWP and partners, and these places provide an important access point for many people.

The self-efficacy barrier can be addressed by highlighting the impact different behaviours can have. For example; the promotion of positive case studies and a strengthened role-model function of our green champions (those people already championing biodiversity action)^{4, p73-75}.

Which behaviours will have the biggest impact and which will be the easiest to change? Once we determine which behaviours will have the biggest impact on biodiversity (a focus of current work) the findings from this survey will assist us to better understand the context, drivers and barriers to uptake of the specific behaviours of interest. The following two pages are a deeper dive into two of the 11 behaviours; 'volunteering for the environment' and 'choosing native plants'.

A focus on volunteering for the environment...



For those who currently don't volunteer for the environment...



• 68% reported capability barriers to take up volunteering such as not having enough time.

We can promote and provide alternative 'volunteering' opportunities that don't take a lot of time, where individuals can choose the time they volunteer, while highlighting the range of benefits that can arise from these activities.



• 12% reported opportunity barriers to take up volunteering - such as being unaware of where to volunteer.

We can address this barrier by improving the visibility of volunteering opportunities, outlining where and when different events are being held across the state.

Your garden

When asked about the places Victorians spend time in nature, 'your own garden at home' was by far the most frequented type of nature. It was also a place where Victorians felt very connected.



Urban habitats are important for many of our native plants and animals^{6,7} and private land is a significant component of this habitat⁸.

There are also many co-benefits of programs that support biodiversity in gardens (e.g. Gardens for Wildlife)⁹, such as increasing social cohesion and wellbeing¹⁰.

Children can also be a key access point into these kinds of programs (e.g. Seedlings for Schools¹¹). Broadening the concept of 'gardening' could help us reach a wider audience. It could include stewardship of community gardens and local green space in an urban environment, or managing private land in a regional environment (e.g. Land for Wildlife¹²). It could also include Traditional Owner perspectives on gardening, as part of 'Caring for Country'¹³. Gardening for biodiversity can meet multiple purposes; increasing connection with nature, increasing the number of people acting for nature^{4, p73-75}, and directly supporting biodiversity.

A focus on choosing native plants when gardening...



For those who currently don't choose native plants when gardening...



- 17% reported a capability barrier to choosing native species such as not knowing what is native.
- 25% reported an attitudinal barrier to choosing native species such as believing native species are less drought tolerant or needed more care than non-natives.

Ways to boost the native plant choice Both of these barriers can be addressed by local governments, industry and other partners promoting the benefits of planting natives suitable to the local area (i.e. drought tolerance, attracting native wildlife) or providing incentives for people to choose natives over non-natives. Urban design can also play a role, in demonstrating the benefits of native plants and building familiarity.

Awareness

Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037 states that a healthy natural environment underpins our way of life without which our economy and wellbeing will suffer.



of Victorians agree that a healthy environment is important for clean food, air and water, a healthy economy and our own wellbeing



of Victorians believe biodiversity (variety in native plants and animals) is important for a healthy environment



of Victorians understand that land clearing, foreign plants and animals, climate change and household waste are threats to a healthy environment



Victoria's biodiversity is in decline and being further threatened by several drivers of change. It is positive that most Victorians understand the importance of the natural environment to them and to society. However, Victorians appear to overestimate the health of the environment, especially those living in urban areas.

Behavioural science now recognises that information alone rarely produces the desired change in behaviour especially in environmental contexts^{14,15} but knowledge of the problem is an important first step.

- Most Victorians (56%) rated the health of the environment as good or very good.
- More Victorians living in metro areas (about 60%) rated the health of the environment as good or very good compared to those living in rural areas (around 50%).
- The higher Victorian's environmental awareness, the poorer they rated the health of the environment
- Older Victorians, women and people who spent more time in nature had higher environmental awareness scores than younger Victorians, men and people who spent less time in nature.



Spending time in nature



There is a growing evidence base showing that spending time in nature has important benefits to our health and wellbeing^{16,17}.

Our survey revealed that;

32%

of Victorians spent time in nature every day or every other day

60%



86%

of Victorians spent time in nature at least once a month



It was also revealed that Victorians were commonly active while doing so, for example, walking the dog or engaging in other forms of physical activity.



Figure 4. Frequency of time spent doing different activities while in nature over the past 12 months.

Women, older Victorians and people outside of Melbourne spent more time in nature compared to men, younger Victorians and Melbourne residents.



The most commonly reported barriers to spending time in nature were lack of time (32%), lack of family and friends who spent time in nature (32%) and difficulty accessing nature (19%). These were most felt by men, older Victorians and metro residents.

Enabling more Victorians to get out in nature will have dual benefits for health and potentially increasing our connection with nature. Promoting social and cultural activities in nature settings, will help address barriers related to social norms (perceived beliefs around acceptable or 'normal' behaviour).

This will enable us to broaden the audience we target by attracting people who are more interested in the social and/or cultural aspects. Local governments are well placed to lead this, and currently already run a diversity of these types of events.

What can we all do to get more Victorians outdoors in nature?

We encourage Victorians to get into nature, take time to connect with nature, and act for nature in the ways which work best for them. For many people, this will be enjoying local parks, beaches and rivers; for others it will be gardening, bushwalking, or walking their dog. For some it will be volunteering, and enjoying the great sense of satisfaction that can bring.

Nature: Explore, Connect, Protect.

When asked what comes to mind when Victorians think of nature

For the purposes of the survey we defined 'nature' as 'everything that is not made by humans. This includes all the animals, plants and vegetation in land and water habitats, located in urban and rural areas, and including highly modified landscapes through to pristine wilderness areas on land and in the water.'

Throughout the survey we used the words natural environment or native plants and animals and did not mention the term biodiversity (we were advised that comprehension levels of the term biodiversity are low).

Strategies for communicating behaviour change interventions and conservation messaging need to strike the right balance between alerting the public to the need for action whilst avoiding "doom and gloom" messaging that can lead to inaction.



Conclusion

The vision of 'Biodiversity 2037' is shared across portfolio partners with a huge range of programs already contributing to it.

It is DELWP's ambition to provide some scaffolding for these projects, including those related to the Victorians Value Nature goal; to improve collaboration, decrease duplication and ensure we can align measures of success.



The VVN Foundations Survey has uncovered a wealth of information on the environmental psychology of Victorians including their values, connection with nature and awareness of biodiversity. It uncovered several positive social norms that we can promote and highlight to help Victorians connect with and act for nature.

We have established a foundation of evidence to support the link between connecting with nature and acting for nature. We now know that Victorians value the natural environment and mostly understand just how important it is for our health and wellbeing.

However, there are many opportunities presented here to increase people's knowledge and experience of nature to help us improve the outlook for our native plants and animals. This is a very short summary of a much larger report produced by the VVN Foundation Survey¹. In addition, the large dataset produced from the survey will be analysed and explored in greater depth as part of ongoing work.

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



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