Nature based outdoor recreation demand and preferences – Qualitative research findings

Prepared for Parks and Wildlife Group, NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change

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Project Contact: Ben Barnes

Office location: Level 13
168 Walker Street
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2069

Phone: (02) 9900 5100
Mobile: 0423 208 676
Email: ben.barnes@ipsos.com.au
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research context

The current NSW State Plan has set the Parks and Wildlife Group (PWG) of the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) the target of increasing the number of visits to National parks by 20% by 2016. Meeting this target will require increasing the frequency with which locals and tourists currently access parks, as well as increasing the number of new users.Facilitating and managing such an increase poses significant planning, management, and marketing challenges.

The objective of this research is to explore the preferences, motivations and barriers in relation to participation in nature-based outdoor recreation. This includes obtaining data on current demand, as well as forecasts for the future, in order to identify the types of experiences and locations in which PWG should supply new nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities and the ways in which it should manage existing opportunities. The research will inform strategies for increasing demand among current and prospective outdoor recreation participants.

Research design

The overall research design involves three stages:

- an initial stage of exploratory qualitative research
- a telephone survey
- a possible follow-up stage of explanatory qualitative research

This document reports on the findings of the exploratory qualitative research stage.
Qualitative research was conducted in three Sydney locations (Cammeray, Harris Park, and Hurstville), four regional locations (Armidale, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, and Merimbula) and in Canberra. The group discussions were stratified by age (18-39 year olds and 40-75 year olds) and by participation status (current or prospective).

Current participants were defined as people who have engaged in one or more of a list of recreation activities that might be considered ‘outdoorsy’ (e.g. cycle touring, mountain bike trail riding, surfing, bushwalking, camping, four-wheel driving and fishing) in the last 12 months. Prospective participants were defined as people who have not engaged in any of the ‘outdoorsy’ activities in the last 12 months but have engaged in one or more of a list of activities that could be considered more general outdoor recreation (e.g. picnicking, scenic driving, riding a bike on a path or road, going to the beach, walking and enjoying the scenery), and are somewhat or very interested in escaping the urban environment and finding places with a more natural backdrop of trees, water etc. (See Appendix B for screening questionnaire).

The sample focused primarily on current and prospective users of National parks near where they live, though one group discussion was held in Dubbo with those who use National parks as tourists.

All group discussions were recruited by a professional qualitative research recruiter, with the exception of the Dubbo group discussion which was recruited by the facilitator approaching guests at a caravan park.

Transcripts from five group discussions from a separate research project conducted by DECC were also analysed for content relevant to the current research program. These group discussions were conducted with singles, young families, older families, working seniors and older seniors living in Dubbo.

**Research findings**

**Activities**

A broad range of outdoor recreation activities were engaged in by the research participants, regardless of their ‘current’ or ‘prospective’ status, and these could be divided into two broad categories based on motivation: regular activities engaged in for fitness (for example walking, jogging, cycling and swimming) and more occasional forms of recreation that provide ‘experiences’ (for example, day trips, longer bushwalks, fishing, camping, social outings and extreme adventure sports).

Older participants and those with children tended to engage more in outing based recreation than individual fitness based activities.
Due to the way they were recruited, ‘current’ participants were more likely to have engaged in more extreme adventure pursuits than others, although these were predominantly undertaken while on holiday.

There were few, if any, differences in activity preferences between metropolitan and regional research participants.

**Drivers to participation**

Primary motivations for participation in outdoor recreation include the desire to have some time out from regular life, to escape stresses and obligations, and to relax, refresh and rejuvenate in the fresh air. The urge to seek isolation and solitude was strongly associated with the need for time out. This need was noted as a strong motivation in both metropolitan and regional locations.

The urge to seek isolation and solitude was somewhat opposed to another primary motivation for outdoor recreation, namely socialising with family and friends. Socialising was a motivator for most to engage in at least some of their preferred activities, and was particularly strong among families with children.

Other prominent drivers to participation in outdoor recreation include being able to appreciate the beauty of natural environments. This more frequently involved a general appreciation of being surrounded by water, landscape, wildlife and flora, and less frequently the desire to study specific aspects of nature. Appreciation of nature with others such as visitors and family also leads to educational experiences for all parties and an opportunity to bond over shared experiences.

Health and fitness was a driver for some, particularly in relation to exercise based activities and was also seen as a secondary benefit of many other occasional forms of outdoor recreation, for example hiking. Outdoor recreation was preferred to indoor forms of exercise by some as it allowed for an experience of nature while also gaining health benefits.

These primary motivations aligned well with the PWG marketing segmentation. Each motivation could be mapped onto one or more segments and all participants were able to point to one or more segments that described the types of recreation experiences they commonly seek. This provides support for the segmentation as a framework for structuring information about available opportunities and for targeting marketing messages by leveraging primary motivations for different outdoor experiences.

**Location**

Participants were able to categorise various settings on a scale of naturalness according to the level of human impact on the environment. In exploring this categorisation, it became clear
that naturalness was also linked to a state of mind, independent of one’s physical surroundings. More natural settings are considered to be those that are away from distractions, where one is able to forget about the outside world. The presence of environmental management and facilities do not impinge greatly on feelings of naturalness or appreciation of nature, provided they do not dominate the landscape or appear to encourage crowds.

Naturalness is less of a consideration when determining locations in which to undertake fitness based activities than it is for more occasional outdoor experiences, which are often driven by a desire to interact with or experience nature in some way. Despite requiring natural features in these locations, the presence of facilities that make an activity or experience easier or more comfortable such as car parking, toilets, tables, running water, barbecues, dedicated walkways and campsites, and appropriate signage are preferred and frequently sought out. These considerations are more pronounced when children or older people are to be involved.

Completely natural surroundings are seen by few as appropriate locations in which to recreate, being far from any modern comforts, and presenting potential dangers from wildlife and strangers. A few embrace the sense of adventure and the opportunity for unique and unpredictable interactions with nature that may arise from exploring such locations. These locations are seen as only suited to adventure activities, such as rock climbing.

**Perceptions of national parks**

National parks are perceived as the most natural places in which to experience the outdoors. They are an iconic part of the Australian way of life. National parks are considered to be well-looked after, with opportunities to engage in a variety of activities. While the entry fee was a sticking point for some, most were happy to pay towards the maintenance of part of the national heritage, although some reinforcement that this is the purpose of such a fee might foster more acceptance.

Generally, the level of management presence within national parks is considered appropriate. However, changes need to be carefully balanced given that the enhancement of features and facilities in some locations are seen as having drawn crowds and have diminished perceptions of these locations as special places to visit. People expect to be rewarded with more isolated, natural environments the further they travel from populated areas.

National parks are generally perceived as being located further away, which limits their attractiveness as more regular locations for fitness activities and other forms of recreation. This is exacerbated by limited awareness of areas of the Sydney harbour foreshore and the harbour islands being designated national parks.

A general lack of information regarding what national parks exist, where they are located and what opportunities or facilities are provided within each was noted in group discussions. Such
information deficits could be addressed by a publication such as the *Guide to National Parks* being more widely circulated.

It is necessary to ensure a range of opportunities exist within parks for recreation and that an appropriate level of facilities is available. However, in creating and marketing opportunities for recreation, it is necessary to reassure current advocates that their cherished experiences will not change and that parks will not become over managed or over run with people and damaged.

**Barriers to participation**

A number of actual and perceived barriers to engaging in outdoor recreation were mentioned that should be considered in the planning of marketing communications and facilities management.

Difficulties in accessibility were frequently mentioned as a barrier to participation in outdoor recreation, particularly within national parks. Such difficulties commonly included a lack of parking, travelling long distances to venues, lack of public transport and few accommodation options located nearby. Crowds also posed a barrier and were, in some cases, enough to turn people away from some locations. The issues of crowds and accessibility were linked, as one must weigh up the difficulty in going to a less accessible place in the search for a more isolated venue. Cost was a barrier for some. This included the cost of undertaking activities, parking and entry fees into national parks. Entry fees to national parks were mentioned as a barrier to outdoor recreation without any prompting. They provided a deterrent to visiting national parks more often and some indicated they try to avoid parks with fees. It was assumed that fees collected are used for the maintenance of parks and this is seen as important, although a certain level of maintenance is expected because of this. Despite perceiving a need to raise money for the maintenance of national parks, the majority would still prefer not to pay to enter.

For participants with families, lack of adequate facilities and play areas for children were a significant barrier to engagement in outdoor activities in certain locations. Older people report having slowed down their participation in outdoor activities due to health concerns. Such barriers indicate a need to ensure opportunities for recreation that cater to children and older people.

Barriers to participation mentioned that are beyond PWG’s influence include poor weather and family or work commitments. Having children was seen by some as leading to a change in the activities pursued, away from individual to more family-focused activities. Generational changes had provided some barriers to participation. Some felt that there were increased safety concerns in children playing outdoors. There was a perception that children’s lifestyles
had changed to an increased preference for indoor activities using technology, and away from natural settings.

**Information sources and needs**

Word of mouth was primarily relied upon as a source of reliable information about outdoor recreation opportunities and locations. Institutions commonly used as sources of information included tourist information centres when on holiday, and local councils. Reference materials, such as the street directory, were seen as quick and easy guides for selecting a nearby location, but do not allow one to gauge how appropriate the location may be. The internet was used as a way to access information quickly about a specific outdoor recreation option, although the broader utility of this method is constrained by the need to have some idea of a type of activity or location on which to base a search. Blogs were seen to provide more detailed reviews about particular activities as they are similar to word of mouth recommendations. Special interest magazines (such as the NRMA Open Road, and automotive and hiking magazines), local papers and lifestyle television shows such as Sydney Weekender provided suggestions for outdoor activities.

There is a need to explore options for increasing traffic to the DECC website given that most assume one exists but very few have ever been motivated to visit. This may be due to a perception that government websites are difficult to navigate.

**Marketing strategies**

Media channels that took advantage of the spectacular scenery of national parks were thought to be the most appropriate forms of marketing such locations to the public. Most were aware that television advertising would be prohibitively expensive for such an exercise. The scale of cinema advertising was suspected to be particularly effective. This strategy focused on leveraging the emotional aspects that motivate a visit to a national park and could incorporate an image based insert in weekend papers.

Another suggested strategy was to focus on the variety of experiences on offer in national parks, which could be alerted to participants through an email subscriber newsletter. Local papers were suggested as a cost-effective way of generating interest in upcoming events and activities at national parks. A publication such as the *Guide to National Parks* or similar was seen as being an effective tool for such a strategy.

Reinforcing the health benefits of outdoor activity was mentioned as tapping into the need to address Australia’s increasing obesity levels, particularly among children.
RESEARCH CONTEXT

2.1 Background

The Parks and Wildlife Group (PWG) of the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) manages around 780 parks and reserves in New South Wales, incorporating such diverse landscapes and sites as rainforests, deserts, winter snowfields, grasslands and eucalypt forests, as well as a wide range of sites of great cultural significance. The PWG is also responsible for providing opportunities and facilities for people to enjoy these public lands.

In recognition of the fact that park use is associated with the health and wellbeing of individuals and society, the current NSW State Plan tasks the organisation with increasing the number of visits by 20 per cent by 2016. In particular, the State Plan undertakes to “increase the range of opportunities and facilities for the community to enjoy a diverse range of recreational facilities in national parks, crown reserves and State forests”, as well as to better promote existing opportunities and facilities and the benefits of engaging in park-based recreation. This objective has been set not only to increase the frequency with which current users visit parks, but also to encourage greater numbers of people to use parks.

Current users

It is estimated that in 2005 there were over 22 million visits to national and State parks in NSW. Parks are used by tourists and local residents for a broad range of activities.

Non-users

Encouraging new users into parks relies on a detailed understanding of the range of reasons and motivations people have for not visiting. The PWG requires more information about this
group. For those who are physically active, for example, it may be that there is limited awareness of the types of opportunities for physical activity provided within parks. There may be a need to promote particular nature-based physical activities, or to encourage the pursuit of one’s preferred physical activity (e.g., walking, jogging, yoga) within parks. The Australian Bureau of Statistics found that in 2005-06, 64% of NSW residents participated in a sport or physical activity at least once in the last 12 months. At least 41% of the people participating in sport or physical activity were engaged in an activity that could be (and may have been) undertaken out of doors and in a park setting.

For those who are not so physically active, there may be opportunities to increase awareness of the health and well-being benefits of visiting and using parks, or for promoting other less-physical recreational activities such as picnicking, camping and other forms of park accommodation, visiting cultural and historical sights and scenic lookouts, and scenic driving.

The Healthy Parks/Healthy People initiative in which NSW participates is an example of one such campaign to increase public awareness of the benefits of visiting parks and the wealth of opportunities provided within them.

**Maintaining naturalness**

The parklands under PWG management cover a variety of nature settings, classed according to their degree of ‘naturalness’, from totally natural (i.e. an absence of any evidence of humans and human interference) to totally urban (i.e. generally non-natural, with the landscape completely altered by humans). The ‘naturalness’ of a site is determined by rating the site on a 1 to 9 scale based on physical, social and management criteria.

It is important that the PWG ensures the protection and sustainability of these different nature settings with increased park usage. While the above classifications may be too specific to be used by the general public, a greater understanding of the general levels of environmental ‘naturalness’ (e.g. completely unspoilt terrain, signposted bush walkways, manicured park lawns) in which people prefer to undertake different types of nature-based activities, will help to determine demand for the provision, maintenance and/or protection of different classes of environment.

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The need for research

In order to successfully achieve the target of increasing visits to parks, PWG needs to supply and market nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities that are in line with the demand for such experiences among NSW residents across the state. It is also important to ensure that increased park usage is achieved in an environmentally sustainable manner. To do this, the PWG required a greater understanding of how, why and where NSW residents currently undertake nature-based outdoor recreation, and why they don’t undertake it or don’t undertake it more frequently, to determine whether the opportunities and facilities provided for park visitors sufficiently match current and estimated future demand, both at the state and regional levels.

The PWG therefore required research to explore preferences, motivations and barriers in relation to participation in nature-based outdoor recreation. This includes data on current demand, as well as forecasts for the future, in order to identify the types of experiences and locations in which it should supply new nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities and the ways in which it should manage existing opportunities.

This research will also assist PWG in planning and the development of services, development of marketing and visitor information and ongoing management and evaluation of parkland use.

2.2 Research objectives

Overall, the aim of this project is to understand and measure the motivations, barriers and preferences of nature-based outdoor recreation users and potential users, and the demand for a range of nature-based outdoor recreation experiences. This will be achieved over two stages of research.

Specifically, the research aims to:

- Identify the optimal approach for obtaining the precision required to understand demand, motivations and preferences for segments of the community such as basic demographic groups at regional scales, including the adoption of regional study areas if required.

- Gain an understanding of the nature-based outdoor recreation experiences people are seeking, the motivations of people who choose to participate in particular experiences, and their preferred settings for participating in these experiences.

- Gain insights to improve the application of the PWG visitor segmentation (messaging segmentation).
- Gain an understanding of the reasons people do not participate in particular nature-based outdoor recreation experiences or do not participate more frequently in particular experiences.

- Estimate the current demand for a range of nature-based outdoor recreation experiences in different settings. The main focus of the study is demand for experiences in the local area, but the demand for experiences undertaken when travelling within NSW is also of interest.

- Forecast likely changes in demand for a range of nature-based outdoor recreation experiences in different settings from 2009 to 2018.

The methodology deemed most appropriate to address these issues is detailed in the following section.
Research design and rationale

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Qualitative/quantitative methodology

The overall research approach for this project is illustrated diagrammatically below. This document describes and reports on the initial qualitative research phase of the project.
3.2 Qualitative phase

An initial qualitative research phase was conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the preferences and motivations of people who choose to participate in particular nature-based outdoor recreation experiences, as well as the reasons that people do not participate (or do not do so more frequently) in particular nature-based outdoor recreation experiences. Specifically, this phase of research enabled detailed exploration of:

- interests in terms of particular nature-based outdoor recreation experiences;
- preferences with regard to the settings in which particular nature-based outdoor recreation activities are undertaken, and perceptions of setting naturalness;
- drivers of participation in particular nature-based outdoor recreation activities;
- perceived benefits received from engaging in particular nature-based outdoor recreation activities;
- constructs on which participants evaluate the extent to which their nature-based outdoor recreation experiences are satisfactory;
- the particular strengths and weaknesses of national parks as venues for outdoor recreation when compared to alternative venues or activities;
- the preferences for marketing channels and sources of information for groups of interest;
- barriers to participation (or more frequent) in particular nature-based outdoor recreation activities; and
- alignment of participants’ interests, preferences and motivations with the segments in the PWG Visitor Segmentation.

In addition, the qualitative phase was designed to ensure that the groundwork is laid for an efficient and effective quantitative stage of research by:

- determining factors of relevance for inclusion in the survey, as well as any factors that appear superfluous for elimination;
- locating any areas of interest not already countenanced by PWG or the research team;
- developing appropriate response lists of nature-based outdoor recreation activities, motivations for participating in nature-based outdoor recreation, and barriers to participation (or more frequent participation) in nature-based outdoor recreation;

- developing, testing and refining an appropriate aggregated set of naturalness classes with related descriptions;

- identifying any other ‘consumer language’, enabling the research team to develop a survey that is easily comprehensible to all groups of interest.

A comprehensive discussion guide was developed in conjunction with PWG and is attached at Appendix A. It is important to note that discussions initially focused primarily on participants’ outdoor recreation preferences; the specific topic of recreation within national parks was explored later in the discussion.

Sample

Group discussions were held with current and prospective participants of nature-based outdoor recreation experiences in NSW national parks. Current users were those who had engaged in one or more of a list of nature-based outdoor recreation experiences that might be considered ‘outdoorsy’ (e.g. cycle touring, mountain bike trail riding, surfing, bushwalking, camping, four-wheel driving and fishing) in the past 12 months. Prospective participants were those who had not engaged in any of the listed nature-based outdoor recreation experiences in the past 12 months, but had engaged in one or more of a list of activities that could be considered more general outdoor recreation (e.g. picnicking, scenic driving, riding a bike on a path or road, going to the beach, walking and enjoying the scenery) and were somewhat or very interested in escaping the urban environment and finding places with a more natural backdrop of trees, water and so on. The screening questionnaire is attached at Appendix B. It should be noted that the difference between current and prospective participants should be thought of more as a difference in the extent to which participants’ engaged in more active forms of recreation, rather than whether or not they engaged in outdoor recreation at all.

The sample focused primarily on current and prospective nature-based outdoor recreation participants located near to where they live. The final group discussion was held with tourists in Dubbo who had undertaken nature-based outdoor recreation on their holidays.

The group structure is displayed in Table 1, overleaf. Error! Reference source not found. (also overleaf) shows the sample age distribution for participants in all of the groups except for those conducted in Coffs Harbour, for which this information was unavailable.
Table 1. Group discussion structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Current</td>
<td>18-39</td>
<td>Harris Park</td>
<td>Oct 28, 2008</td>
<td>5.45 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prospective</td>
<td>40-75</td>
<td>Harris Park</td>
<td>Oct 28, 2008</td>
<td>8 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Current</td>
<td>40-75</td>
<td>Cammeray</td>
<td>Oct 30, 2008</td>
<td>6 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Prospective</td>
<td>18-39</td>
<td>Hurstville</td>
<td>Oct 29, 2008</td>
<td>7 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Current</td>
<td>18-39</td>
<td>Armidale</td>
<td>Oct 30, 2008</td>
<td>5.45 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Prospective</td>
<td>40-75</td>
<td>Armidale</td>
<td>Nov 3, 2008</td>
<td>8 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Current</td>
<td>40-75</td>
<td>Coffs Harbour</td>
<td>Dec 15, 2008</td>
<td>6 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Prospective</td>
<td>18-39</td>
<td>Coffs Harbour</td>
<td>Dec 16, 2008</td>
<td>6 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>40-75</td>
<td>Merimbula</td>
<td>Dec 16, 2008</td>
<td>6 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>18-39</td>
<td>Canberra</td>
<td>Dec 16, 2008</td>
<td>6 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tourist</td>
<td>18-75</td>
<td>Dubbo</td>
<td>Jan 23, 2009</td>
<td>4 pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Sample age distribution (all groups except Coffs Harbour)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conduct of the research

All group discussions, except for that held in Dubbo, were recruited by a professional market research recruiter. The tourist group was recruited by the group facilitator through a personal approach to guests at a caravan park and was done so with permission of the caravan park administration.

Group discussions were facilitated by members of the Ipsos-Eureka Social Research Institute project team. They were two hours in duration and all participants were offered a monetary incentive of $70 as a thank-you for their participation.

All research was carried out in accordance with the international standard for market and social research, AS ISO 20252.
Transcripts of five group discussions from a separate research project conducted by NSW DECC were also analysed for content relevant to the current research program. These group discussions were conducted in August 2008 with singles, young families, older families, working seniors and older seniors living in Dubbo. Relevant content identified in this transcription analysis was found to reflect comments in the group discussions conducted by Ipsos-Eureka. This data was taken into account during the data analysis stage and incorporated into the research findings reported in Section 4.
RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Preferred activities

All participants engaged in some form of outdoor recreation, regardless of their status as ‘current’ or ‘prospective’ recreation participants. It was considered by most to be essential for one’s health to ‘get out of the house’ regularly. Almost all had one or two outdoor activities they engaged in regularly or semi-regularly, as well as a range of other preferred outdoor experiences or activities engaged in on occasion.

Preferred outdoor activities mentioned by participants could be separated into two main categories:

- those engaged in regularly primarily for health and fitness, such as walking, jogging/running, cycling, swimming and other exercise-based activities; and

- those engaged in on occasion as a leisure pursuit or an ‘experience’, such as longer bushwalks, hiking, camping, picnics and barbeques, scenic driving, fishing, going to the beach, and adventure activities such as abseiling, skydiving and rafting.

The most common pursuits in these categories are discussed below.

Regular activities

The most common activities engaged in regularly were walking, jogging, cycling, swimming and team sports. The primary motivations mentioned by participants for engaging in these regular outdoor activities were health and fitness. While other motivations such as enjoyment were also mentioned, they were seen more as secondary benefits or by-products of knowing one was doing something to improve one’s health and wellbeing.

The overwhelming majority of participants across regional and metro areas cited walking as their preferred method of regular outdoor recreation because it was the easiest form of exercise to undertake. Younger participants were more likely than older participants to engage
in the more active fitness pursuits such as jogging, cycling, swimming and team sports. Older participants were more likely to get their regular exercise through walking.

"I have at times gone to the gym, but I've found walking is the best way to maintain your weight. It's easy, you just put your joggers on and walk out the door, and you can combine it into your weekend." Prospective, 18-39, Metro

Proponents of activities such as walking and cycling reported often using these activities to get to work or the shops, saving time by including exercise into other aspects of their daily routines. For example, a large proportion of participants in the Canberra group discussion rode bicycles regularly for transport but had chosen the bicycle over a car for fitness reasons.

Regular preferred outdoor activities were reportedly undertaken as close to home or work as possible. Most participants, regardless of where they lived or how active they were, cited a reluctance to travel any distance to be able to engage in these activities. Convenience, then, appeared to be the driving factor determining where and when such activities were undertaken. The physical aspects of chosen locations were considered only in so far as they enabled the activity to be undertaken. This is why walking, jogging and cycling for health and fitness were predominantly done on the streets and pathways around one’s home suburb. Those living nearer to bush, parks or waterways were more likely to engage in their preferred regular activity in or near these areas than on streets and footpaths, provided they could be accessed easily from home, because these areas were considered more picturesque, safer and more comfortable to recreate is, yet were still very convenient.

"Whenever I move to a new area, I like to explore the little different walkways that they have. Balls Head is beautiful, there’s lots of little walks down at McMahon’s Point and there’s lots of little harbour walks, and of course the Manly to Spit one is gorgeous as well." Current, 40-75, Metro

**Occasional activities or experiences**

The outdoor recreation activities or experiences participants engaged in on occasion differed in motivation from those undertaken regularly. Occasional recreation was seen as more of an "experience" than an activity, affording participants a chance to escape, to bond or socialise, or an opportunity to do something different, fun, challenging and/or adventurous. This form of recreation often required planning, could take from half a day to multiple days and was typically undertaken on weekends or on holidays. Such outdoor recreation included bushwalks and hiking, picnics, fishing, camping, scenic driving, trips to the beach, taking kids to the park, visiting scenic or historical locations, boating and other water sports, snow sports and adventure sports.
“It’s definitely about the experience. I probably wouldn’t do all this stuff every week, probably once a month, I’m so busy.” Prospective, 18-35, Metro

The most commonly mentioned occasional activity was bushwalking. For many this simply referred to walking in bushland areas not far from one’s home, for example along the northern harbour foreshore. For others, it referred to walking on tracks and trails as part of a visit to a national park. Some more active participants in the 18-39 year old discussions occasionally went on more difficult all-day or overnight bushwalks or hikes. As one participant commented,

“I actually plan my bushwalks. It’s more of a weekend thing, okay, we have to go for a bushwalk and look something up and drive to the destination and actually go for the walk.” Current, 18-39, Metro

Activities based around the water were also mentioned by a many participants as preferred forms of occasional outdoor recreation. Such activities included going to the beach, boating, fishing, surfing and swimming. A handful of more active water-based pursuits were mentioned, such as rafting and wakeboarding. Water activities, particularly going to the beach, were seen as something people of all ages could enjoy. Also popular among those with children were ‘water parks’ with slides. Water was also considered by most to be a desirable scenic component for a hike or bushwalk.

“I like it when there’s something to see on the hike, like a waterfall, water, yeah any kind of a creek or a swimming hole is fantastic, especially when it’s hot. Coastal walks are fantastic as well, there’s a great one out at Byron Bay, there’s lots of things to look at. I get a little bit over the rainforest.” Current, Tourist

For many of those living in locations near water, engaging in activities on or near water was seen as an essential part of their lifestyle. Indeed, most of these people (for example those living in Coffs Harbour and Merimbula) had selected their home location based on its proximity to water. For those interested in water activities and living some distance from the coast, trips to the beach or harbour were a special outing, with nearby rivers and lakes used more frequently for fishing, boating and swimming.

“For me, water’s a big thing, whether it’s a beach or river, even lakes or waterfall type places.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

“I think when you live here, it’s paradise. You are near to the water, you can people watch all day long, others fishing on the beach or kids playing.” Current, 40-75, Regional
Due to the questions asked when they were recruited, the “current participant” groups contained people who occasionally engaged in more adventurous activities, such as abseiling, white water rafting, skydiving, 4WD driving, and dirt bike riding. However, it was more often the case that these activities had been engaged in while on a holiday than while in one’s home city.

“A couple of months beforehand I’ll start getting out more and doing actually some more exercise, and then to actually be able to complete the event, or complete skiing for a weekend after I haven’t skied for years.” Current, 18-39, Metro

I do more extreme type things ... on holidays, that’s when you have a lot of time to do anything... you’re not doing housework, you’re not confined so you can actually do more activities because you’re on holidays. Current, 40-75, Metro

The majority of participants reported occasionally visiting council or national parks or beaches for a “day out”. This was in fact the most common form of occasional outdoor recreation overall because it usually involves one or more particular outdoor activities over an extended period of time out of the house. Bushwalking was often engaged in on days out such as these. Other activities incorporated into a day out include scenic driving or visiting a scenic spot or historical location, a picnic or barbecue, swimming at a beach or waterhole, bike riding, and informal ball or other sports. Such days out are particularly popular among those with children, extended family groups and groups of friends.

These types of outings generally required some planning in terms of selecting a location and preparing and packing food and/or other equipment, and the selected location was almost always possible to access by car.

Participants were generally happy with the range of outdoor recreation options available to them locally, particularly for regular fitness based activities. Many had selected their homes based on proximity to preferred outdoor recreation options, such as the coast, waterways, parks and bush land.

Participants who commonly engaged in fishing suggested that cleaning tables and bins could be provided at appropriate locations. Some participants pointed to opportunities for more bike tracks.

4.2 Drivers of participation

Participants were asked why they choose to engage in the forms of outdoor recreation they most prefer. Many motivations were mentioned, with most citing multiple motivations for their preferred forms of recreation. Some pointed out that they often had different motivations on
different occasions for engaging in the same activity and that this determined where the activity was ultimately undertaken.

The motivations mentioned are discussed below.

**Time out**

The primary motivation for engaging in outdoor activities for people of all ages and from all locations was the urge to take time out. Taking time out is understood to be essential for physical, psychological and emotional health and well-being. ‘The outdoors’ is described by most, possibly more emphatically so by those living in metropolitan areas, as a place to escape from the stresses and routine of every day life. Psychologically, this is in contrast to ‘sterile’ and ‘cramped’ indoor environments such as offices and homes where obligations and commitments exist. Parks and scenic locations such as waterways and the coast in particular offer a chance for one to escape, relax, reflect and rejuvenate. They can afford a sense of isolation and a place to find some peace and quiet in the fresh air.

For some participants, engaging in activities outdoors gave a sense of freedom. Participants also spoke of finding isolation and a chance to reflect even in the presence of other people, for example, going for a walk in a public park at lunchtime. The key factor is that one is doing something different from the routine, often for oneself and/or by oneself; the opposite of most activities one must engage in daily.

Participants reported engaging in most of the forms of outdoor recreation mentioned in section 4.1 for the purpose of seeking time out. This sort of escape was found through both regular exercise-based as well as occasional ‘outing’, or experience-based, activities.

"Like there can be other people there, but like rock climbing down to do some fishing, just that isolated feeling from everything else." Current, 40-75, Metro

"It's nice to isolate yourself, like you don't feel like you have to talk to anyone and even if there are other people say on the next headland or next path, you can just forget that they are there, and it's just you." Current, 40-75, Regional

"I think there is something in that for everyone getting back to basics and just enjoying life for what it is, without the rest of the BS." Current, 40-75, Regional

"Suburbia does get busy, but sometimes it's just nice and quiet to go down to the park, you get the feeling you're coming out from these units everywhere into this oasis, then you come back refreshed." Prospective, 40-75, Metro
Socialising and bonding

Another key motivation to engage in outdoor recreation is the chance to socialise and bond with family and friends. Again, almost all participants cited this as a main driver of their participation in outdoor activities, with the majority mentioning the importance of spending quality time with loved ones.

An outdoor setting is often the chosen location for socialising because it is more scenic and more spacious than an indoor environment, and may be more convenient for all parties to access. Furthermore, many different activities can be engaged in that cannot be at home and no clean up is required.

"It’s the space; the kids can run around…I live in a unit, so if kids come around they’ve got nowhere really to go.” Prospective, 18-35, Metro

"There’s no cleaning. There’s no wash this or that.” Prospective, 18-35, Metro

Outdoor activities most commonly engaged in for the purposes of socialising or bonding are not surprisingly any of those that can be done with companions, such as bushwalking and hiking, going to the beach or the park, camping, scenic driving, picnics, barbecues and team sports, and tend to be more “outing” or experience based activities or adventure sports than short-duration activities engaged in for exercise.

"I like to go for the social aspect, so when I go out, I go out with friends, I also hang out, catch up, and have something to eat. It’s not so often that you get together and do these sorts of things, so it’s a good social environment, and the atmosphere’s great as well.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

Appreciation of nature

Many participants commented on the appreciation and experience of nature as a driver to participation in outdoor activities. Several participants mentioned that the simplicity and ease of appreciating nature and its beauty, through watching wildlife, viewing flora, sitting by or going out on the water and enjoying views of the landscape, can often be an activity in itself. While few ventured outdoors with the specific intention of examining flora and fauna, appreciating nature in a more general sense was often a motivation to visit national parks, to go on bushwalks and scenic drives, to go fishing or camping, and to visit lookouts and landmarks.

Many, particularly those on holiday, also spoke of a desire to discover and explore new and beautiful environments.
"I go with other people to take them around to see things around Coffs and Dorrigo – I like taking people up there because I like the walks around there.”
Prospective, 18-39, Regional

"It’s good when the time becomes available or when a visitor turns up, and they haven’t been somewhere before. Oh well come on, I’ll show you this spot or that spot.”
Prospective, 18-39, Regional

Those with children were particularly motivated to engage in outdoor activities for the purpose of nature appreciation, as it provided an opportunity to entertain children with something they may not have encountered before or often.

"And with kids, especially young kids, really simple things can be really entertaining; they don’t have to be massively entertaining. Can just be a bunch of rocks behind the beach that they explore for an hour.”
Prospective, 18-39, Metro

**Education**

Another common reason for engaging in outdoor activities and one that often coincides with a desire to appreciate nature is the ability to educate selves, family and friends about the natural environment and areas of aboriginal cultural and historical significance. This motivation is especially strong for those with children, those on holidays or those with family and friends visiting from elsewhere.

Taking children to national parks was seen as a powerful way to teach them to appreciate the natural environment and instil an understanding of the importance of conservation.

There was some recognition that the process of educating others also allowed one to see the world through new or different eyes, even possibly fostering closer relationships.

"The cultural aspect is a big draw card around here, seeing as it’s a large indigenous population.”
Current, 18-39, Regional

"We do a lot of scenic driving through the national parks; they’re good education for the children too, for them to understand a bit more what it’s like out there.”
Prospective, 40-75, Metro

"It’s like when you have children, you suddenly start to see the world through their eyes, you can do that through other people’s eyes, like Jeff is rediscovering a lot of things he’s seen before.”
Prospective, 40-75, Regional
Health and fitness

Some participants mentioned the health and fitness benefits delivered by outdoor recreation as a motivation to participate. For some, particularly younger participants, walking, running, hiking, cycling and adventure activities were preferred to going to the gym. This was often due to the activities being seen as not only an opportunity to improve health and fitness, but in many cases or locations as being an ‘experience’ as well. Exercising out of doors is seen as providing the added benefits of fresh air, time out from indoor life, and a scenic environment. For some, the greatest benefit to exercising out of doors is that many activities can be engaged in for free and are as convenient as stepping outside one’s front door.

“I joined a bushwalking club once and they were regarding it as exercise, I was regarding it as an experience. So we were at odds, I don’t see an outdoor activity as exercise, I see it as an experience.” Current, 40-75, Metro

“Getting exercise out in a different place where you have a reason to do it, rather than just going to the gym where you always see the same walls.” Current, Tourist

Challenge and adventure

Key motivations for those engaging in adventure and snow sports are the difficulty of the activity and the sense of personal achievement derived from having challenged oneself and succeeded. Such activities also afford a sense of adventure and fun and can often deliver additional benefits such as the chance to bond with others, exercise, and escape from everyday life.

“I do it for the adrenaline and thrill ... Mother Nature is pretty damn strong, when a big wave comes at you sort of thing, and so, you sort of don't know what is going to happen.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

Life stage

A secondary driver, enabling some to participate more in outdoor activities than they had previously been able, was changing life circumstances. Parents whose children had recently moved out of home and retired couples mentioned finally having more time available to enjoy the outdoors.

“Being retired you can just do whatever you want, it’s good.” Current, 40-75, Metro
4.3 Marketing segmentation and motivations

During group discussions, participants were presented with a marketing segmentation of outdoor recreation ‘experiences’ and were asked to indicate the segments in which they were particularly interested. All participants were able to point to multiple segments they felt encompassed the types of experiences they were seeking in outdoor recreation. Most participants, regardless of activity level or location, selected ‘Family, friends and communities’, along with one or two other segments as reflecting their preferences in seeking recreation experiences. No one felt that his or her own preferences were not mirrored in the segmentation.

The segmentation was not explored in depth; however, it was interesting to note that the segments seemed to align well with the motivations for engaging in outdoor activity that were most commonly mentioned (see section 4.2). The six segments and their corresponding motivations are listed below:

- Health and well-being – time out, escape, relaxation, reflection, rejuvenation, health and fitness, exercise;
- Family, friends and communities – socialising, bonding, spending quality time, sharing experiences;
- Nature lovers – appreciation of nature, education;
- Natural wonders – appreciation of nature, discovering and exploring new and beautiful environments;
- Outdoor pursuits – personal challenge and achievement, fun and adventure;
- Aboriginal cultural heritage – education.

There was some discussion in one group regarding whether Aboriginal and cultural heritage required a category of its own when it was also present as an experience within the natural wonders segment. For others, though, this was a mark of respect.

"I find the Aboriginal cultural experiences a bit weird to be a separate segment in itself. I think that should be part of the cultural and self-education, like education side of things, or natural wonders, rather than having its own separate segment." Current, 18-39, Metro
“I think including the Aboriginal cultural experiences [is good]. I’ve been on a few and they’re really, really good. My daughter went up in the mountains the other day and took kids from the schools, and one of the elders took them up and showed them the paintings on the rocks. It was beautiful.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

The research supports the notion that the marketing segmentation should not be thought of as a segmentation of different types of “recreation-seeker” or even of particular recreation activities, given that people’s preferences (and many activities) are covered by multiple categories. Rather, it should be considered a segmentation of types of recreation “experiences” an individual may be seeking on any one occasion.

4.4 Location

Participants’ preferences for different outdoor recreation settings were explored within group discussions. Generally, where each type of activity was engaged in was dependent on the purpose for the activity.

Regular vs. occasional activities

For most regular fitness activities, the preferred location was one that was close to home or work, and that was convenient and cheap to access. It appeared essential that the location contain the features needed for the activity and anything beyond this was just a bonus. For example, for someone who likes to jog for exercise, the preferred location was required to have an appropriate surface for running and be easy to access from home or work. Any natural features were appreciated, but not essential. For this reason, a local park or more scenic walkway would be a preferred location in which to jog, compared to suburban streets or footpaths, but not if it required travel to get there. This type of ‘natural location vs. convenience’ trade-off applies to most regular exercise-type activities.

“It’s proximity, because I don’t want to be travelling an hour each way to do something. I’d prefer to walk out the door to an activity…for me it’s about ease of getting to.” Current, 40-75, Metro

“[preferred location…] It would depend on my intentions… Are we looking for peace or exercise?” Current, 40-75, Metro

The natural aspects of a location played more of a role in participants’ determination of where to engage in occasional or experience based activities. This is because ‘naturalness’ was often a large component of the experience being sought. Convenience still factored into most decisions, although many reported willingness to travel farther or to more difficult to access locations in order to experience something special or to escape crowds. Despite a desire to
engage in occasional recreation in more natural areas, some facilities were considered essential, especially if children were to be involved. As an example, one participant mentioned preferring to drive to Wiseman’s ferry for barbecues with family:

“That’s a bit of a trip, but it’s a nice drive out there. When you get out there, you’ve got the Hawkesbury River there to sit back and relax on. They’ve got, those places, have got reasonably good facilities out there.”

Current, 18-39, Metro

The relationship between naturalness and facilities is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Perceptions of naturalness

The NPWS naturalness categories 1 to 9 were presented to participants as a visual stimulus to encourage discussions about the classes of environment within which people prefer to recreate.

Participants considered the level of naturalness to be related to the extent to which humans have altered the physical surroundings through construction and cultivation, introducing or removing flora and fauna and imposing buildings, roads, barriers, signs, and facilities.

For most, however, naturalness was not solely related to the physical impact of humans on the environment, but tied psychologically to the feelings of experience, adventure, isolation and freedom. A more natural setting is where one can experience the feeling of nature at hand, not necessarily somewhere that is undeveloped by humans. For this reason, participants spoke of being able to find peace and solitude in a city park at lunchtime.

“When I want time to myself, that’s when I’ll do the botanical gardens... To me, when I do that, I don’t really look at what’s around me that much...it’s just walking and clearing my head...” Prospective, 18-39, Regional

“It has something about it too. I would say I love the natural environment, but I can still spend my time in those parks.” Prospective, 18-39, Regional

Initially, most stated that they would most prefer to visit locations that had retained as much naturalness as possible. However, once issues such as accessibility and availability of facilities were considered, it became apparent that a place could be considered acceptably natural, dependent on the activity to be pursued and provided it is somewhere where you are able to forget that you live in a city for a while. Naturalness was also perceived to be related to the presence of crowds, with a more natural location believed to be one receiving fewer visitors.
Lower classes of naturalness were preferred for fitness activities and those involving social or family interaction, such as picnicking and barbecues. As mentioned previously, naturalness in these situations is often happily traded for convenience. Man made structures that are useful were welcomed for most types of outdoor recreation, particularly for families with children and older participants. Of most importance, for the majority of occasional activities, was having somewhere to park the car, toilet facilities of some kind, even if located in parking areas, were also seen as most desirable. Participants also liked having somewhere to eat or to purchase food, somewhere safe for children to play, and barbecues. For some participants engaging in outdoor activities to socialise with family and friends, it was important that the chosen location have a range of activities that appeals to all members of the group.

"The top one [naturalness class 1] is for a workout." Current, 18-39, Metro

"If a busier place is more accessible, I’d go to it just as soon as I’d travel 2 or 3 hours to get that isolation.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

“Somewhere where you would park your car right up to the spot and walk over there.” Current, 40-75, Regional

“Good barbecue facilities and amenities, the place is clean, it makes your trips out there a little bit easier, more comfortable.” Current, 18-39, Metro

“I like to have facilities.” Prospective, 18-39, Regional

“Just a toilet, running water and maybe a table or something. But more for hygiene reasons…” Prospective, 18-39, Regional

“As long as you have a table so you can sit somewhere and have a meal.” Prospective, 18-39, Regional

“And have a variety of services available, so food...if you’re not taking food with you, it’s close, or somewhere you can get a nice coffee afterwards. Nice scenery, and natural habitats really. Because in our day, who knows how long they’ll last?” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

“[Naturalness] doesn’t particularly influence me. I’ll go down the Georges Rives as much as I will to some outback, isolated, pristine river.” Prospective 18-39, Metro

“If you don’t have something for the kids to do, they’re in your face going, “What do I do?” So it’s got to be based on around the family so everyone can enjoy themselves there.” Current, 18-39, Metro
Mid-level classes of naturalness were preferred for most outdoor experiences. The vast majority of those interested in bushwalking preferred trails and boardwalks, for their own comfort as well as to protect the natural environment from damage. Even seasoned bushwalkers were in favour of man-made tracks and wider trails in some areas.

"I don’t mind a flat path as long as around me looks good. If you’re walking around the water, a flat path is good; you don’t have to look where you’re going.” Current, 18-39, Metro

"A wooden walkway, it looks all right, it doesn’t spoil the feel.” Current, 18-39, Metro

"I like it when the trails are a bit better maintained. I prefer not to bush bash too much...just wider so you can walk through it.” Current, Tourist

Those interested in camping also preferred to have some facilities at dedicated camp sites. Facilities were seen as particularly important for the safety and security of older participants and children. Management features such as access roads and signage were also seen as necessary and not to conflict too much with a location’s naturalness.

"National parks to me is, you need some man-made features to really, to make the natural beauty better and make it more interesting.” Current, Tourist

"I like something where there is a car park, but I like to be able to walk into an area that is looked after that is still natural.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

"To me that was...natural, even though it was a picnic area with some seats and they had bins and everything. It was looked after and protected so that the animal life was protected and felt safe there. So I think there is natural and there is natural.” Prospective, 18-39, regional

"Bobbin Head’s really good, you can go bushwalking down there, there’s tracks there and then you come out at Bobbin Head and there’s shops down there and picnic area and stuff for the kids. It’s got a bit of everything there.” Current, 18-39, Metro

"Signage is the important one, to know where you are going... it is just reassuring you that as you go that that is the way to that beach and will get you to that picnic spot or road ... I would hate for anyone out of town to try and find Palm Beach for instance.” Prospective, 18-39, Regional

"I think with natural habitats, you’re going there for a particular reason, otherwise, if you’re taking your family with you, you want to have facilities.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro
Higher classes of naturalness were considered most important for adventure pursuits such as hiking, caving and canyoning, or activities that were undertaken to seek out isolation, time-out or peace and quiet. However, as mentioned above, this was related more to a perceived acceptable level of naturalness, rather than a desire for completely untouched surroundings.

"I think too it's almost like a percentage thing. It's at least 80% natural, and at least you still have those main elements, you have got your water, your open space, your fresh air, your birds and your animals. You have got just a nice mix where people can still go out and socialise and be independent in a common area I suppose." Current, 40-75, Regional

"Yeah, but at the same time I don't like crashing through things. If it is too dense, I don't want to cause any damage." Prospective, 18-39, Regional

Very few preferred a totally untouched, natural environment. While the preservation of untouched environments was seen as important from an environmental conservation perspective, such places were not commonly seen as environments within which to recreate. Participants most expected to view these environments from a lookout. Entering such naturalness classes represented the potential for getting lost, and for encountering danger and harm. Some feared for their safety where there were no other people present, while others were apprehensive about encountering only one or two strangers in a remote location.

"This is definitely lookout area for me." Prospective, 40-75, Regional.

"You could definitely get lost, even if you know what you’re doing." Prospective, 40-75, Regional.

"It would be nice to see it, but I’m not going to be going trekking around the hills." Current, 40-75, Regional

"You are going around a mountain or something and looking around at that picturesque scenery. Then you think, this is magic and you pass it by." Current, 40-75, Regional

"I’d say the chances are you’d go in there and not come back out." Current, 40-75, Regional

"It would be okay if they had a national park with a patrolling officer on duty all the time. He’d have to be there 24 hours a day and maintain the place with maybe one or two workers." Current, Tourist
4.5 National Parks

National parks have a high standing in people’s estimation as beautiful places in which one can experience and learn about nature. They are seen to be the most natural, untouched places to experience the outdoors, to escape distractions, and meet people of a similar mindset, as opposed to more developed alternatives.

"National parks... the epitome of actually going out and getting out for the day and forgetting what’s behind you.” Prospective, 18-39, Regional

"I do enjoy the state forest, but the national park is somehow more sacred ground ... it is something that makes you aware that you are sharing the earth with other living things and it is a nice reminder and nice to respect that. I think you feel more part of the world, of the natural world yourself.” Prospective, 18-39, Regional

"I see local parks as being a developed thing, whereas national parks are just natural. So you could probably do a lot of the same things in your local park, but just that natural environment, the preservation of that natural environment rather than creating something.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

"I’ve often found in national parks and anywhere outdoorsy, you’ll come across the same people and the same mindset basically, and they just don’t want any problems, they want to enjoy their walk, their camper, the drive or whatever the case is. It’s just a mindset or a zone.” Current, 40-75, Metro

Participants displayed a sense of pride and ownership of natural parks. They are seen as a defining feature of natural Australia and of our way of life, as well as being places to show off to visitors and children. Most participants, regardless of their current or participant status or their location, were able to name multiple national parks within their local area (meaning any within one or two hours’ drive from their home) and some even further afield.

"Doesn’t calling them national park mean this is a place of national significance to Australia and if we haven’t seen it before we should all be interested in going in and having a look?” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

"My new wife was a city girl, and every time we go out to the bush now, to see her pat an echidna, or the first real koala she saw in the tree, or the first snake she nearly trod on... it’s nothing to me personally it’s just another thing, but to her, this damn koala in a tree had a scratch, and she goes, he’s waving!” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

National parks are generally believed to be well cared for and to provide a range of appropriate facilities to engage in desired activities. However, most consider visiting a national park as an
outdoor experience in itself. One visit may incorporate multiple outdoor activities requiring a range of facilities, for example a scenic drive, a walk, a swim, and a picnic/barbecue, and is usually a full or half day outing. National parks are also most commonly visited on holidays.

“I think national parks in Sydney have a day feel, a day trip. You do a day trip to a national park in Sydney because they’re set up structurally to be that.” Current, 40-75, Metro

“You go to a national park - or that’s what we do - depending on which part of the national park you want to go to, but once we are there, we decide [on the activity].” Current, 40-75, Regional

“I thought you took your own things to do in a national park, because really when you get there, there is just the park. You know, you take your fishing rod, you take your swimming gear…” Current, 40-75, Regional

National parks were not generally seen as locations for regular fitness type activities given that they are perceived as generally less convenient to access, and for some they are. The entry fee for some parks in the Sydney area deters people from visiting them more regularly. Some who are particularly attuned to the conservation necessity imposed on national park areas see regular activity as posing a potential threat to the vegetation and wildlife. Many of those who are currently exercising regularly in national park areas, for example along the harbour foreshore, do not perceive these places as being within national parks.

Many positive childhood memories are associated with national parks. In particular, Lane Cove National Park and the Royal National Park in Sydney were mentioned by many as places often visited when younger. Management changes in these places were particularly noted because people have a tendency to continue to visit those places they went to as a child. There was also a perception among some that visiting national parks as an outing is not as popular among younger generations as it has been in the past.

“It hasn’t really been spoiled like Lane Cove National Park ... you go down... and they’re catering for weddings and receptions.” Current, 40-75, Metro

There was a perception that national parks are located at some distance from metropolitan areas. In particular, there was some confusion regarding national parks in the Sydney area, with many failing to recognise the national park areas of the harbour foreshore and harbour islands as being national parks. Lane Cove and Kuring-Gai national parks were also considered by a few to be lesser “national parks” than the Royal National Park.
"I make a distinction between literal national park where you can camp and camp in swag, and our parks because they are day tripping sort of things”
Current, 40-75, Metro

The facilities present in national parks and the management presence does not appear to impinge on people’s perception of the naturalness of these areas. As mentioned, most participants considered some management and facilities necessary for their own and children’s comfort and safety, and for the continued protection of the environment.

However, providing for visitors’ safety impinged too greatly on others’ appreciation of national parks. Some of these participants perceived there to be an excessive amount of signage. It was pointed out that not all signs warranted attention, and that this served to dilute the key safety messages.

"If it’s an issue of erosion, they don’t want people walking off the track, that’s fine, if there’s endangered frogs in the pool and they don’t want you swimming with sunscreen on, that’s fine, but sometimes the safety signs have gone a little over the top. ...It’s been a bit of a joke for us since we’ve arrived in Australia, to be honest.” Current, Tourist

Within parks, the competing demands for opportunities to socialise and places in which one can seek isolation need to be balanced. Views on the presence of others in chosen locations for socialising were mixed. While preferring parks with picnic facilities, most accepted that such areas were likely to draw a number of people, but disliked visiting places that were too crowded. Indeed, this was the most commonly mentioned reason for avoiding certain parks, for example Lane Cove, that were perceived as having become too crowded.

“They’ve overexposed Lane Cove National Park now. Everybody and his dog’s down there.” Prospective, 40-75, Metro

“Yeah, we stopped doing the same thing because there were just too many people. The idea of getting away for a lovely picnic with your family, and you had 60 or 70 or 100 other families right in your vicinity and then the rest of the area was just overpopulated.” Prospective, 40-75, Metro

4.6 Barriers to participation

Weather

Inclement weather was seen to be the primary barrier for almost all participants to engage in outdoor activities. The strength of this barrier was dependent of course on the type of activity planned, with social outings including barbecues, picnics and beach trips affected most. Some were happy to take part in certain activities, for example fishing, regardless of the weather.
The weather was a particular concern for group discussion participants located in Armidale, due to the variable nature of weather conditions in that region.

**Time and other commitments**

Most participants cited a lack of time due to work, family, household and social commitments as one of the largest barriers to engaging in preferred outdoor activities.

Parents’ calendars are mostly planned around the needs and movements of their children. For many this leaves little time for personal outdoor pursuits and may even limit the frequency of more child-friendly outdoor experiences.

> "We count down the years until we’re child-free, but then you’ve got grandchildren to look after, so I guess it’s never going to happen that we’re actually going to have weekends to go, okay, we’re going to pack up and go here." Current, 40-75, Metro

Some of those with little spare time had compromised by incorporating outdoor activity into their hectic schedules in small ways, by walking or cycling to and/or from work. For most of these people, longer duration nature-based outdoor experiences or those motivated by other factors than exercise were left for special occasions such as long weekends or holiday times.

**Accessibility**

Accessibility refers to a range of factors such as distance from home, public transport options, quality of roads, cost of entry, availability of parking, availability of camping, ease of walks, and distances from parking to entry – all of which limit ability to participate in outdoor recreation.

Car parking was a concern for most. There was a belief that parking nearby to city parklands or beaches was becoming increasingly difficult to find and expensive. Distances from parking lots to outdoor recreation areas at some beaches and national parks were mentioned by some as a barrier to access, particularly for older participants.

> "Parking, access to parking is very important. If you can’t get a park nearby... say I can walk to all these places, I spend a bit of time walking to start walking before I get to the scenic place and then walk on. There could be more parking." Prospective, 18-39, Metro

> "Yes, and that stops a lot of families – when my grandparents were alive, they used to like and appreciate going to the parks and so on, but when you have to park miles back, they can’t make it, they are just not up to it bodily.” Current, 40-75, Regional
For those without a car, getting to national parks for outings is very difficult, due to a lack of public transport options. This was a concern in some regional areas where national parks are located some distance from the town centre. To improve accessibility for older people and those without cars, bus tours were suggested.

“I think also for some people who maybe do have the time in country towns, transport is a problem too. We’re like miles from national parks; we can’t just hop on the bus.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

“The bus tour idea, that caters for us older people. That we’re going to go on half-day tours to areas that have a little platform straight off the bus.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

Most are able to find a range of options for outdoor recreation close to home. While engaging in these in a national park might be preferable for some, the actual and perceived distance of a national park from home poses a psychological and/or a physical barrier to access. In a lot of cases the distance is believed to be prohibitive and for some, it is. However, as mentioned, some living in Sydney fail to realise that significant national park sites exist all around the harbour and many more within one hours’ drive from the city.

The closing times of national parks posed a problem for several participants. There was a demand for the ability to stay longer. For activities such as outdoor concerts and other entertainment, where alcohol would be consumed, there is also a demand for the ability to stay overnight. The issue in these cases then becomes the accessibility of the national park from local accommodation.

“That’s especially true for young people and the drinking population; they’re going to have to stay overnight.” Current, 40-75, Metro

The issue of accessibility on some roads for certain vehicles was also mentioned.

“Sometimes it’s hard to tell whether you can get places in our van, or if the roads are good, I know they’ve got a four-wheel track or a two-wheel track, but sometimes it’s hard to tell if it’s a dirt road, but can we actually make it, because some of them are very steep.” Current, Tourist

Increasing accessibility is also understood to be a delicate issue. Most do not want their favourite locations opened up to masses of people. There is a belief that those who are willing to make the effort to access difficult areas are rewarded with relative isolation from others.
"A lot of the things are self-defeating, they’re talking about opening things up, making them more accessible, but one of the reasons we go there is because there aren’t many people.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

Cost

The costs associated with certain activities were a commonly mentioned barrier. Certain activities, including snow sports, water sports, even camping, cycling and hiking require specialised equipment that is often expensive to purchase or hire. In addition, for activities that require travel to a particular location, costs of petrol, accommodation and entry fees can be prohibitive as well.

Cost of entry to national parks was mentioned by many as a factor taken into account when planning outdoor recreation. The associated costs of parking and use of facilities, such as barbeques, were also included in the cost-benefit calculations of some. The entry fee acted as a disincentive for most, who reported exploring free or cheaper alternatives more frequently than a fee-charging national park.

The entry fee to national parks was a particular point of contention. It was mentioned spontaneously in both metropolitan and regional groups. The fee was a deterrent for some to visit parks more frequently and was of concern to most, even those whose local parks did not have such a fee. There was some uncertainty about the purpose of an entry fee. A minority was of the opinion that, since they paid taxes, they should not have to pay for entry into national parks. Most accepted that a nominal fee might be necessary to ensure parks are well maintained, but expect a certain level of facilities as a result of this. A few commented that a fee was necessary to ensure that parks do not become overrun with visitors. However, the maintenance supposition was challenged by participants in Armidale who noted that their local parks received much the same level of management but do not charge an entry fee.

"Some of them are starting to charge you to go in and I get very cross about that. We pay our taxes... it’s not very much, I know it’s not very much and it’s not going to break the bank, but I get really cheesed off if I have to pay to go to a national park.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

"Lane Cove National Park, in the picnic areas, they actually have rangers moving around and they will ask people to leave the park.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

"There’d probably be someone cleaning in there too, pick up the rubbish that people do leave, like cans of drink.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

“Probably you’re paying for the man to stand at the gate and collect the toll. I’m sure in Sydney that’s the case.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional
“The ones you’re paying for, they’re getting people in there to look after it to manage it more, and the professionals say, well that tree belongs here, that’s a banana tree and it’s come from somewhere else, feral animals and everything. You’ve got to pay people to come in and catch the feral animals.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

“You’re talking about national parks down south? You’ve even got to pay to use the road. If you just want to go through, you’ve got to pay, even if you’re not going to stop the national park. I think that’s just ridiculous.” Current, 40-75, Metro

“It’d be better if it wasn’t but if you go to Bobbin Head, it has pretty good facilities down there so you don’t mind paying for that because it’s well looked after, the barbecues are pretty clean, so say 15 bucks isn’t that much, but it’d be better if it was nothing.” Current, 40-75, Metro

“If you don’t feel you’re getting value for money, you don’t go back... if you have to queue up to pay your 5 bucks and get in, there’s other ones around you can probably go to.” Current, Tourist

Facilities

As mentioned in section 4.4, locations with little or no facilities proposed a barrier for a number of participants to comfortably engage in outdoor experiences, particularly picnics, camping, and scenic walks. Adequate, clean and well maintained facilities, such as barbeques, toilets, and walkways of some level of stability were important. Families were also interested in areas that would suit all age groups, such as play areas for children.

“You check to see if it’s a good area for kids or for grown ups, or people with the same interest. If you’ve found a nice park with gardens in it and kids stuff in it, you know the kids are going to be there for a while and you can walk around.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

“If they have tea and coffee brewing for when you get there, that’s always good.” Prospective, 40-75, Regional

“Good barbecue facilities and amenities, the place is clean, you know, that way it makes your trips out there a little bit easier, a little more comfortable.” Current, 18-39, Metro

Crowds

Participants living in Sydney often felt that many of their favourite outdoor recreation locations were crowded and that this limited their desire to visit. There was a sense that one had to balance coping with crowded areas against the time spent to travel further away to escape the throng. The practical problems associated with having too many visitors included large queues
for entry and to use facilities. In more isolated locations, some feared for their safety where there were no other people present, while others were apprehensive about encountering only a handful of strangers. Others felt a sense of camaraderie with fellow visitors to certain locations; that these people, though strangers, may share a similar outlook on life.

“If a busier place is more accessible, I’d go to it just as soon as I’d travel 2 or 3 hours to get that isolation.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

This issue was also a concern in regional areas, where participants may weigh up other factors such as quality of the roads against the desire for fewer people.

“If you have to work a little bit harder to get to a place, you should be rewarded for that, so you are generally, because there’s fewer people out there, maybe another type of person wouldn’t go out there. If you’re backpacking and you’re in a camp… there’s going to be a different kind of person out there than if you get a paid flat, holiday park.” Current, Tourist

There was some concern that providing more facilities and encouraging people to use national parks could cause overcrowding and pose a conservation threat to sensitive natural areas, especially those in already popular locations, such as Lane Cove National Park. It was understood that a balance is required to be maintained.

**Life stage**

Getting older, having children or moving into a different social circle often limited one’s participation in certain activities engaged in previously. For most, the desire to engage in outdoor activities was still present; it was simply channelled into different pursuits. For example, for participants with children, it meant a change in focus from individual activities to those focused on the family.

“You just can’t sit still, that’s how I used to feel, whereas when you’re older you feel more laidback, and I’d rather not… what can I do that’s least energy expending that can still give me exercise and spend time with… work’s so much more demanding so you really need that time.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

“Not so much that I don’t have time, but it takes you away from everyone rather than doing something… so probably out and about as much as before, but the individual kayaking, golfing… things I might have done before tend to now be more family based recreational activities.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro
Some participants noted that their walking preferences had changed due to life stage, from more difficult planned bushwalking when they were younger to walking closer to home in less natural settings as they got older and had more competing demands or different interests.

A small number commented that a disinterested partner or having grown up children served to reduce their interest or ability to go bushwalking.

“When I was younger, I used to be into a bit of bushwalking, but when you have a wife who totally has that thing of, the bush is alright, it’s over there, I’ll be over here... Now I’m happy to walk on the black bitumen.” Current, 18-39, Metro

Health

For some participants, particularly in the older age bracket, health concerns served to limit the range of outdoor activities they could pursue. The desire for “getting outdoors” was still present and where possible, these people tried to engage in less demanding pursuits, such as walking or scenic drives.

Safety concerns

Several safety concerns were mentioned in relation to outdoor activities, with many scared to be alone at certain parks and beaches, or engaging in outdoor activities after dark.

Some participants felt that there was a generational change in perceptions of safety such that their parents would not have worried about them engaging in outdoor activities unsupervised, but that they would be extremely reluctant to let their children pursue similar activities.

As mentioned in section 4.1, participants also held some concerns about safety in isolated areas, in regards to dangerous wildlife, the chance of becoming lost or hurt, and harm from strangers.

“There are a lot of kids going around and breaking into your car if you leave it somewhere for a while at the moment. Like leaving it around, or for night sometimes, they can knock your windows out and take your wallet, and spare change and stuff. So I don’t go out fishing at night just because of that.” Current, 40-75, Regional

“You feel vulnerable, see, so we tend to choose parks, don’t we, that don’t look too isolated, that look like people are there.” Current, Tourist
Lifestyle trends

Several parents perceived there to be a generational change in attitudes towards outdoor recreation, with the younger generation preferring indoor activities. There was also a perception among some that the “‘tradition’ of visiting national parks for a picnic or a day out was slowly being lost.

“I think our generation appreciates outdoor activities and the younger ones these days stay inside and play video games.” Current, 18-39, Metro

“More or less our generation, the national park experience we probably all went there as kids, but the generation after have all slowly been weaned off that being outdoors.” Current, 40-75, Metro

4.7 Information sources and needs

A wide variety of sources for information about nature based outdoor recreation were mentioned in the group discussions. All of those mentioned are discussed in this section in rough order of frequency of use.

The most trusted source of information about outdoor activities and experiences for all participants was through word-of-mouth. It was suggested that you could be sure if a location or experience would be right for you if someone you know had recommended it. Often with national parks, there was no way to know if a road or picnic area was closed unless you heard it from someone who had visited recently. It was thought prudent to speak to someone who had been previously to avoid disappointment, especially if entry fees are to be paid or the location being visited is a long distance away. One participant mentioned having discussed the location they were planning to visit with a park ranger.

The internet is most people’s first stop for relevant information about most things, including recreation opportunities. Nearly all participants had internet access either at home or at work. The internet and is used in several ways to find information. Search engines, most often www.google.com, were used to find out about particular outdoor experiences, but most stated that these are not very helpful if you are not sure of the type of activity or opportunity, or park that you are seeking. Blogs were considered more useful sources of information than simple internet searches because they reported the experiences and views of people who had actually experienced the location or activity.

“If you know exactly what activity, you can look it up on the Citysearch, for like ballooning, or... if it’s something that specific. But if you’re just looking for a park, I think it’s a lot harder, to know where those areas are, unless you look at the old –fashioned map in your Gregory’s.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro
“All the blogs they have pretty much the information on things to read, the cycling, fishing, swimming ... they have all the information basically.”
Prospective, 40-75, Metro

Some had visited council websites for activities in their local area. Although most participants suspected the National Parks and Wildlife Service would have a website, almost none had visited it. This may be due to a perception that Government websites are cluttered and difficult to navigate. As one participant commented:

“Government websites, they’re just overdone and they’re not user friendly. And Google’s easy.” Prospective, 40-75, Metro

This is a particular problem for any promotional material containing the NPWS website address, because, despite being aware that one exists, many are still not likely to visit.

The perception of government websites as being difficult to navigate may not be completely incorrect in relation to the current website at www.environment.nsw.gov.au. One person who had visited the site did not find it to be particularly helpful. The current site’s home page contains information for a variety of stakeholder audiences, including business and government and “find a park” is but one option of many other non-recreation related options. It is assumed by participants that to visit this site, one must know about which park and experience they would like to find information.

Tourist information centres were most commonly mentioned as a good source of information about activities in the local area, although most stated they would only visit these while on holiday or if looking for information for locations outside their local area. Participants living in Coffs Harbour perhaps paid more attention to tourist-oriented publications for information on recreation opportunities in their local area than those in other locations because of the volume of tourist information that is widely available in that area. There was some suggestion that activities in the local area are not promoted enough to locals. A similar sentiment was mentioned in some Sydney discussions, with participants pointing out that tourists were often more aware of activities and opportunities in the Sydney area than locals.

“There is one, the Penrith Information Centre, they’ve put out a, I think it’s monthly or something or other, it’s beautiful and it’s glossy and it’s to do with Blue Mountains and things like that.” Prospective, 40-75, Metro

Other institutions mentioned as possible sources of information were local council offices and business bureaus, although few obtained information through these channels.
Street directories were often used to estimate the distance to local parks and to gain a rough idea of the size and location of nearby parks. Street directories are particularly useful to refer to while in the car but have the disadvantage of not providing any sense of what scenery or facilities to expect.

“The street directory ... has a bit of information about parks, national parks, things like that. So I usually refer to those books.” Prospective, 40-75, Metro

Local papers, special interest magazines, such as automotive, cycling, and hiking, and the NRMA Open Road magazine were also mentioned as sources of information for those interested in particular activities or experiences.

“Usually the way I find out those sorts of things are on is I read it in the local paper.” Current, 18-39, Metro

Lifestyle television shows, such as Sydney Weekender, were also mentioned by the participants in Sydney group discussion as a good source of suggestions for occasional outdoor activities.

“Not websites, but at home we watch Sydney Weekender and get quite a lot of activities from that.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

A significant need exists for sensibly structured, accessible information about recreation options. Most mentioned that they lacked the information to be fully aware of the recreation options within national parks in their area. When asked, most indicated they would welcome information structured according to the PWG marketing segmentation, so that they would know what their recreation options were within different parks based on the type of experience they were seeking or the motivation for their outing.

“Yes, it makes it easier, rather than looking at the whole brochure, say ‘okay I want to do some outdoor pursuits, and so I’ll go to those couple of pages.” Current, 40-75, Regional

“Like nature lovers aren’t going to want to read through pages of canyoning and rockclimbing and caving to get to what they need, so if they were about to go straight through a heading like that. Same with health and wellbeing, you’re ditching the cycling and 4-wheel driving and stuff like that.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

The 2008 Guide to National Parks was shown to participants at the end of the group discussions and was perceived to be a fantastic publication, providing the sorts of information for which participants had expressed a need. Where sufficient copies were available, all participants took
one home at the end of the discussion. However, only one participant mentioned having previously seen the publication and none were aware of where they might obtain a copy. It was expected the guide might be available at tourist information centres, although it was hoped that it, or a suitable summary, might be made more widely available, for example, by being included as a Sunday newspaper insert.

“I know there is a nice national parks booklet, A4 bit smaller. It’s got all the areas, and regions and we picked up one at the Ranger’s Cottage on the other side of Grafton Range, and it was really good.” Current, 40-75, Regional

4.8 Potential marketing strategies

As part of the group discussions, participants were asked to brainstorm strategies to encourage people like themselves to visit national parks.

As much of the appeal of national parks relates to spectacular scenery, visual media was thought to be most appropriate promotional medium to affect people emotionally. The scale of cinema advertising was suggested as an effective way to advertise national parks. Some commented that the local paper was a useful place to advertise or list upcoming activities. Most acknowledged the cost of television advertising to be prohibitive for marketing national parks.

“Doesn’t cost much to advertise in the local papers.” Prospective, 40-75, Metro

“Your local paper, like advertising. You always advertise your fetes and spring carnivals and things like that, but maybe like a weekly column, you can advertise what’s on in a national park. Posters in the train station. Visual advertising.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

“Just people talking about the health and well-being one, is a big attraction. Coming home at the end of the day, sitting at Museum train station, you see a billboard for Royal National Park. That’s enough of a motivator; yeah we’re going to that.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

“I think it’s important to sort of emphasise, try to engage your senses when you’re looking at advertisements. Because with advertisements, all you can see is the visual aspects, but when you’re in the surroundings of the national park, obviously you can feel it, you can smell it, you can hear it.” Prospective, 18-39, Metro

An advertising strategy suggested by participants involved focusing on the health benefits of outdoor activities. Participants pointed to the increasing obesity levels in Australia, especially among children, and suggested an approach which focused on the benefits of exercise in a
location such as the national parks. The combination of exercise and experience of nature was noted as a potential attraction.

"We could try and enter the market on the obesity crisis, because all these children are becoming so obese because of the lack of exercise, so we could advertise towards the parents and whoever else wants to get involved. So double the experience, get exercise and experience nature." Current, 18-39, Regional

Another suggested strategy was to focus promotions on the variety of experiences available within national parks. Many participants felt that national parks had opportunities to increase awareness of the activities that take place, including park organised events. Some specific suggestions relating to this strategy were to provide an email subscriber newsletter or calendar of events provided by email or printed in local papers that would detail upcoming activities in local national parks.

As mentioned, it was also suggested that a parks guide or some other informational or promotional material be included as an insert into weekend newspapers.

It was considered important that marketing activities be handled in a sensitive manner to limit both the prospect and the perception of the general public being invited in large numbers to over-run and damage sensitive and protected natural environments.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is interest in a broad range of nature-based outdoor recreation experiences. In terms of planning for activities and opportunities that may be provided within a national park or state forest environment, it makes sense to think of these activities as separated by motivation into two broad categories: regular, fitness-based activities, such as walking, jogging, cycling, swimming and other sports, and occasional experience-based activities, such as family outings and picnics, camping, scenic drives, and adventure activities. While most preferred forms of recreation can be positioned on a continuum from passive to more active activities, it seems that when choosing where to undertake recreation activities, the intensity of the activity is less of a factor than is its motivation. For example, someone who enjoys walking may do so in the streets or paths around their home regularly for fitness purposes, but along the coast when seeking time out and in a national park with a group of friends when doing a hike or bushwalk as a social event.

Participation in nature based outdoor recreation is based on a variety of motivations and perceived benefits. Getting out of doors is often perceived as motivation enough in itself. The majority see outdoor recreation as providing a valuable opportunity to take a break from the stresses and obligations of their lives, to seek peace and quiet, to rest and rejuvenate. Outdoor recreation also provides opportunities for social interaction and bonding, education and appreciation of nature, personal challenge and achievement, and health and fitness benefits. The motivations identified in group discussions were aligned well with the six categories of the PWG marketing segmentation, suggesting that the segmentation is a good summary of the broad categories of types of experiences or motivations for experiences that participants in outdoor recreation may be seeking on any given occasion. Multiple segments appear to articulate a person’s range of recreation desires, for different occasions and even possibly on the same occasion. There is evidence to suggest then that the segments may indicate useful
emotional levers to pull in marketing materials as well as provide a guiding framework for the structure of information about recreation opportunities within national parks.

Perceived naturalness is a function of the extent of human intervention into the natural environment as well as state of mind. Most importantly, a certain level of intervention is tolerated and even expected within natural environments for the protection of the environment and to ensure the safety and security of those recreating within these locations.

Most prefer locations they perceive to be more natural than man-made. However, few people desire to venture into completely untouched territory for safety reasons and are not convinced it is wise from a conservation perspective to encourage recreation in such locations. At least a basic level of amenities and maintenance is desired and sought, and this becomes more of a necessity when children and older people are involved.

The level of naturalness most preferred depends on the type of activity engaged in and the purpose for which it is undertaken. For more regular fitness based activities, naturalness as a feature is appreciated but not essential. Convenience and appropriate facilities to undertake the activity are the primary considerations in choice of location. Naturalness is a feature more desirable for occasional experience based activities, where experiencing a natural environment is often the activity itself. Locations are perceived to become more natural the further one travels from metropolitan areas, meaning they are less convenient to access and more suited to occasional day trip activities or experiences than regular exercise. However, the increased perceived ‘naturalness’ of farther located places is seen as a welcome reward for the effort of getting there.

National parks are considered the optimal environment in which to experience nature as untouched by humans as one could wish to endure. They are well maintained and cared for and provide opportunities to engage in a range of different activities. Perceptions of distance, accessibility and cost prevent their being accessed more frequently by many. They are seen primarily as a place for a whole or half day outing, rather than a location to engage in a specific activity, despite this being how some would primarily use them. There is a lack of awareness of the proximity, accessibility and diversity of some local national park areas, particularly in the Sydney and surrounds region. Opportunities exist to increase this awareness and ensuring broader access to the Guide to National Parks publication may be such a way to do this.

A balance must be sought in the provision of facilities and the level of management presence within national park locations given concerns that too much interference invites crowds, diminishing enjoyment and the ability to sustainably manage natural environments. This is a particular concern regarding parks within the Sydney area.
A number of barriers exist to participating in nature-based outdoor recreation, some of which, such as weather and a lack of time are beyond the influence of the PWG. However, others such as cost of entry, lack of transport, access, and appropriate facilities for a range of activities, ages and abilities, and sufficient information about opportunities may be able to be addressed.

The issue of entry cost to national parks is a contentious one. Most are aware that such fees exist even if their local parks do not charge one. While a nominal fee is seen as necessary to ensure a management presence and to discourage too many visitors, the exact purpose was queried. Knowledge of, or the suspicion that fees may be charged, does provide a deterrent to more regular national park visitation. Consideration might be given to promoting upon collection how the fee may contribute to conservation or management programs and facilities.

Word of mouth is relied on primarily for accurate information and recommendations relating to outdoor experiences and destinations. The internet (mainly through Google searches and then exploration of blogs for reviews) is a common port of call, in particular for more specific information on activities and locations. Tourist information centres are accessed only on holidays or on day trips to regional locations, not for information about local activities for which local papers and councils are often consulted.

Few had visited the National Parks website, though most suspected one might exist. While opportunities exist to promote the National Parks website, the general reluctance of members of the public to visit government websites needs to be considered and addressed. Consideration could be given to creating a separate site for visitor information and the promotion of opportunities that does not have the appearance, or simply the volume of additional stakeholder information, of a government website.

The Guide to National Parks publication is a very attractive and informative publication. For many it fills their most significant information gap, providing information about the locations of national parks and the particular facilities and features of each. Wider availability should be considered.

Participants marketing suggestions were realistic and a useful insight into what might be most motivating. Suggestions of most value appear to be promoting relevant activities and events via email newsletters and in local papers, and utilising emotional, image-based marketing, aligned with the primary motivations, to encourage people to think of national parks as somewhere close to home in which to seek time out to rejuvenate, to bond with family and friends or to engage in physical activities for health and fitness.
APPENDIX A: DISCUSSION GUIDE

Demand for nature-based outdoor recreation

Discussion guide

Introduction

- Thank for coming along.
- Introduction to market research / group discussions.
- Facilitator’s role: to raise topics and issues and then for you to tell me what you think.
- No right or wrong answers, your opinion that counts. Please be honest.
- Group rules: one person speaks at a time / feel free to disagree.
- Audio / video taping, mirror. Reassure confidentiality, anonymity.
- Session will take 2 hours.
- Topic: Today’s discussion will be about issues to do with lifestyle and recreation.
- Hand out incentives (sign and check contents of envelope).
- Refreshments, toilet facilities, please turn off mobile phones.
- Participants introduce themselves.

Involvement and interest in nature-based outdoor pastimes

- Please tell me all the different types of things you enjoy doing outdoors, such as parks, forest, the coast and other natural settings? If necessary: What else? Think about experiences, activities or outings?
Drivers and barriers to participation in nature-based outdoor recreation

- What is it that attracts or draws you to these particular pastimes? What do you enjoy about them?
  - What benefits do you get out of these pastimes?
  - Probe on: health/fitness/exercise, well-being, enjoyment, social/family, competition/challenge/excitement, learning/education/discovery, fresh air/carbon neutral air, natural beauty, appreciating outdoors, relaxation/tranquility/time-out/peace & quiet, getting away/escaping, etc.

- What sorts of things influence how often you engage in these things that you enjoy doing outdoors?
  - Probe on: interest, time, distance/accessibility, cost, awareness/knowledge of opportunities, competing demands/work/family, appropriate/relevant opportunities for family/children, other recreational activities, health/fitness, other interested parties/companions, perceptions of danger, comfort of facilities/skills and equipment.
  - Would you like to do these kind of activities more often than you do? Why is that?
  - What sorts of things get in the way of you engaging in these pastimes more often than you do currently?

- Are there any types of nature-based outdoor recreation that you’ve done in the past, but have not done recently? Or any that you’ve considered doing, or have wanted to do, but have never actually tried?
  - What are they?
  - What sorts of things have stopped or discouraged you from engaging in them (recently)?
  - What sorts of things might motivate or encourage you to take up or try these things?

Preferences with regard to the settings and perceptions of setting naturalness

- Thinking about the things you like to do outdoors, what makes for a particularly good experience?

- How does where you are for these experiences and activities make a difference? What are the places like where you most like doing these outdoor things?

- When you engage in outdoor recreation activities like picnicking, bike riding, etc, how interested are you in escaping the urban environment and finding places with a more natural backdrop of bush, the sea or whatever?

- How important is it that the setting appears natural? What does being natural mean to you?
  - Probe on:
- **Physical** – Extent of (temporary or permanent) human impact on flora and fauna (i.e., level of presence of natural vegetation and wildlife, introduced vegetation and wildlife), soil or landscapes, including disturbance, modification and hardening (i.e., level of presence of human intervention on ground and landscape), relative dominance of built structures versus natural environment (i.e., extent to which the location has been infiltrated by constructions).

- **Social** – Extent of visitation, evidence of other visitors, extent to which contact with other visitors should be expected and can be avoided, amount of contact with other people.

- **Management criteria** – Extent and types of tracks/trails/roads (e.g., sealed or unsealed), signage, extent of management presence and monitoring.

  - Obviously, there are differing degrees of naturalness. Here are twelve cards. As a group, can you please put these twelve cards into a smaller number of categories from most to least natural? [Show images.]

  - Which of these images represent the sorts of settings in which you tend to engage in [certain pastimes grouped together]? Which would be your preferred setting?
    - What is it about environments or setting with other levels of naturalness (i.e., more or less natural than your preference) that you are less attracted to or that puts you off?

**Satisfaction with nature-based outdoor opportunities**

- How happy or satisfied are you with the opportunities or facilities available to participate in your preferred outdoor experiences or activities in your area (i.e., Greater Sydney, Northern Tablelands, North Coast)? Why?

  - Are there sufficient opportunities to engage in your preferred outdoor experiences? **Probe on: number and range of opportunities, times available.**

  - Are these opportunities/facilities in the types of settings/locations you prefer?

  - Are the opportunities/facilities of adequate quality? In what ways? [NB How do participants judge the ‘quality’?]

  - Do the opportunities/facilities available meet the needs of others in your family/group?

- What sorts of improvements or additions would you like to see in terms of opportunities or facilities to participate in nature-based outdoor recreation in your area?

  - **Probe on: more of a specific type of opportunity / facility, bigger range of opportunities, opportunities / facilities in different locations / parks, appropriate / relevant offerings for self and family / companions, opportunities in different types of settings, different or better quality facilities being offered, etc.**
Probe on: how or in what ways the opportunities or facilities could be ‘better’.

- And what has been your experience when you’re travelling and on holidays?

Drivers and barriers to participation nature-based outdoor recreation in National Parks

- What experiences and activities do you currently engage in within National Parks?
  - Is there anything we have not discussed yet which you do in National Parks in particular?

- Why do you do them there? What influences where you choose to do them?

- What are the advantages or benefits of engaging in these pastimes in a National Park?
  
  Probe on: learning / education / discovery, fresh air / carbon neutral air, natural beauty, relaxation / tranquillity / time-out / escape / peace & quiet, getting away / escape, etc.

- What sorts of things stop or discourage you from visiting National Parks more often for these recreational purposes?
  
  Probe on: interest, time, distance/accessibility, cost, awareness/knowledge of opportunities, competing demands / work / family, appropriate / relevant offerings for self and family / companions, other recreational activities, health / fitness, other interested parties / companions, perceptions of danger, overcrowding, parking availability, amenities / facilities.

- What sorts of things might motivate or encourage you to do these things in a National Park?
  
  Probe on: more of a specific type of opportunity / facility, bigger range of opportunities, opportunities / facilities in different locations / parks, appropriate / relevant offerings for self and family / companions, opportunities in different types of settings, different or better quality facilities being offered, etc.

- Thinking about outdoor recreation pastimes that you have done in the past (but not recently), or have only thought about doing, or even things you’ve first heard about tonight, what sorts of things would attract you to doing them in a National Park?
  - What sorts of things would put you off or discourage you?
  - What sorts of things might motivate or encourage you to try them in a National Park?

Segmentation

- [Show segment descriptions.] Which of these descriptions do you feel particularly describe you and the outdoor experiences you are after?

- Is there anything you would add to these descriptions to make them more accurate?

- Is there anything you would remove from the descriptions? Or anything that doesn’t seem to ‘fit’ for you?

- What outdoor experiences you are after are NOT covered by one of these descriptions?
Awareness

- If you were seeking information on opportunities or facilities for nature-based outdoor recreation, how would you go about it? Where would you look? Who would you contact? *Probe on individual activities such as mountain-biking, kayaking, etc.*
  - Have you done this in the past?
  - What sort of information were you after?
  - How easy was it to find? Did you find the information what you were after?

- Where or how have you heard about opportunities/facilities for nature-based outdoor recreation in National Parks?
  - *Probe on: word of mouth/friends/family, work, website, brochures, newsletters, magazines, etc.*
  - Were you actively seeking out this information or did you just come across it?
  - Were any of these particularly effective in raising your awareness? Were any particularly effective in building your interest?

- Have you tried to find any information about nature-based outdoor recreation in National Parks?
  - If so, what sorts of information have you sought?
  - How did you go about trying to find the information you were after?
  - How easy was it to find? Was there information or any specific details that you weren’t able to find?

Marketing and messages

Group exercise:

(i) We talked about how you became aware of opportunities in National Parks for different outdoor recreation pastimes, and which of these ways were most effective. I’m going to split you into 2 groups now. I want each group to spend a few minutes discussing *how you think National Parks could go about informing you of opportunities to engage in outdoor recreation pastimes, and motivating you to try them or do them more frequently.* You’re then going to present back to each other. So you need to think about:

  - How could they get the message to you?
  - What would they say?
  - [Discuss responses to group exercise.]
Closing

- The findings of this research will be used to help National Parks to refine their strategy for matching opportunities for outdoor recreation with demand among NSW residents.
APPENDIX B: SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is <name> from Ipsos-Eureka, a social research firm. We're looking for people to attend a discussion group for an important research project we are conducting on outdoor recreation activities, like picnicking, bike riding, and going to the beach.

[IF THEY ARE NOT FREE TO TALK NOW, ASK IF YOU CAN CALL BACK AT A MORE CONVENIENT TIME.]

If you participate, you'll receive $70 as a 'thank you' for giving up your time and helping us with the project. Around 6 to 8 people will attend the discussion and it will be very relaxed and informal. You'll probably find it quite interesting. Refreshments will be provided and it will take about 2 hours. Would you be interested in attending?

[IF NO:] Okay. Thanks for your time.
[IF YES:] Thanks for being willing to participate. I just need to ask you a few questions to make sure you're one of the people we need to speak to for this particular project.

1. [ALL. RECORD GENDER. NO FEWER THAN 4 OF EITHER GENDER IN EACH GROUP]

2. [ASK ALL] Into which of the following age bands do you fall?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Band</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>TERMINATE WITH THANKS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>CONTINUE TO Q3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>CONTINUE TO Q3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>CONTINUE TO Q4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>CONTINUE TO Q4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>CONTINUE TO Q4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>CONTINUE TO Q4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 75</td>
<td>TERMINATE WITH THANKS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. [ASK ALL 18-39 YEAR OLDS] Do you have children under the age of 13 years?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>ENSURE A MIX IN GROUPS. CONTINUE TO Q3.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>ENSURE A MIX IN GROUPS CONTINUE TO Q3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Now I’m going to read you a list of recreational activities, and I’d like you to tell me whether you’ve engaged in any of them in the last 12 months. [Read list]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picnicking</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visiting natural landmarks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenic driving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riding a bike on a path or road</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to the beach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking and enjoying the scenery, flowers, birds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenic photography (If queried: photographing natural landscapes or scenes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engaged in none of the above</th>
<th>DOES NOT QUALIFY. THANK AND TERMINATE.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in one or more</td>
<td>CONTINUE TO Q5. CONSIDER FOR CURRENT PARTICIPANTS GROUPS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. [ASK IF HAS ENGAGED IN GENERAL OUTDOOR RECREATION.] And now I’m going to read you another list, this time of recreational activities that might be considered a bit more “outdoorsy”. Again, I’d like you to tell me whether you have engaged in any of these activities in the last 12 months. [Read list]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle touring (If queried: extended cycle trips)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mountain bike touring (If queried: extended mountain bike trips)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain bike trail riding (If queried: riding a mountain bike on bush trails)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surfing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddling and kayaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiking and bushwalking, NOT including short strolls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush regeneration and land care activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock sports (If queried: including rock climbing, canyoning, caving, abseiling)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4WD-ing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-country skiing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird-watching and other wildlife-watching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snorkelling or diving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse-riding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engaged in none of the above</th>
<th>CONTINUE TO Q6.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in one or more</td>
<td>QUALIFIES FOR CURRENT PARTICIPANTS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. [ASK IF HAS ENGAGED IN GENERAL OUTDOOR RECREATION ONLY.] And when you engage in outdoor recreation activities like picnicking, bike riding, etc, how interested are you in escaping the urban environment and finding places with a more natural backdrop of trees, water, etc? Would you be ...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest Level</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very interested</td>
<td>QUALIFIES FOR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat interested</td>
<td>QUALIFIES FOR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all interested</td>
<td>DOES NOT QUALIFY. TERMINATE WITH THANKS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[IF CRITERIA ARE NOT MET:] Unfortunately, you’re not one of the people we need to talk to for this particular project. Thanks for being willing to participate.

[IF CRITERIA ARE MET:] You are definitely one of the people we need to attend our discussion. We are looking for participants to attend a discussion group to be held in <location> at <time> on <day and date>. Are you available to attend this group?