



**Sustainable
Communities
and Waste**

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Achieving a Nature Connected Future: science, strategies and stories: Nature Connection Project Workshop Summary Report

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Sustainable Communities and Waste Hub acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Custodians of Country and recognises their continuing connection to land, sea, culture, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging. We support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their aspirations to maintain, protect and manage their culture, language, land and sea Country and heritage.

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Purpose of the Workshop

The Nature Connection Workshop was hosted by the Nature Connection Project (hereafter called ‘the Project’) in partnership with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), the University of Tasmania and the Healthy Environments and Lives (HEAL) National Research Network.

This work aligns with Goal #1 of *Australia’s Strategy for Nature 2024–2030* (Figure 1) to connect all Australians with nature. Many local governments have responded to this goal with their own policies and programs. Locally, this goal is echoed in the City of Hobart’s strategic vision and supported by a growing body of evidence linking nature connection to life satisfaction, reduced stress, and environmental stewardship. As Australia’s *Strategy for Nature* states: “Connecting Australians with nature is essential to our long-term mental and physical health, economic prosperity and national identity.” The challenge now is not *why* but *how*: how to achieve this vision and how to embed nature connection in policy, practice, and everyday life at scale.



Figure 1. A diagram of the Goals of the Australia’s Strategy for Nature 2024-2030¹

The two-day workshop was held on the 1st and 2nd September 2025 at Nipaluna/Hobart, Lutruwita/Tasmania. This workshop created a platform for sharing and exchanging knowledge and information. The key aims of the workshop were to:

- Share findings of The Project team’s research into nature connection, including its benefits for wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours.
- Gather insights from various policy-makers regarding priorities for nature connection, identified knowledge gaps, and research needs.
- Hear from practitioners and industry partners on their views of what works and what doesn’t in nature connection programs, as well as what they need to know to create more successful programs.
- Facilitate the development of networks and ideas among participants, enabling enhanced collaboration to co-design pathways for achieving a more nature-connected Australia.

¹ Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. (2024). *Australia’s Strategy for Nature 2024–2030*. (p.16), <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/australias-strategy-for-nature-2024-2030.pdf>

The agenda program of this workshop was as follows.

Day 1: Nature Connection and Wellbeing landscape in Australia (Presentations and discussion live streamed for blended delivery)

- The impacts of nature connection on wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours (results from the Nature Connection Project)
- Policy relevance and information needs
- Multicultural considerations for nature connection
- Practitioner perspectives (successful programs and research needs)
- Training session: values-based communication about nature connection to generate behaviour change and stimulate action (by Common Cause)
- Shared dinner

Day 2: Creating impact (in-person only)

- Training session: Protecting our own wellbeing from climate anxiety and eco-grief
- Measuring, monitoring, and sharing the progress of nature connection in Australia (qualitative and quantitative techniques)
- Transdisciplinary collaboration for nature connection
- Envisioning a nature-connected future for Australia
- Creating a nature-connected future for Australian communities

The workshop successfully brought together over 60 researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders from Tasmania and around Australia. The list of participants is presented in Annex 1.

This workshop summary report captures the insights, themes, and calls to action that emerged across the two days of presentations, panel discussions, and collaborative visioning on nature connection.

Executive Summary

Key outcomes

Participants were asked to share their vision, discuss barriers to overcome, and identify pathways for a more nature-connected future. Strong themes that emerged for a shared vision, key barriers and pathways are as follows.

Vision for a More Nature-Connected Future

Our vision for a nature-connected future centres around stewardship, reciprocity, and respect, with calls for children spending more time in nature; slower, more present living; and biodiverse, more resilient cities. The vision is not of nature as a luxury, but as the default way of life: equitably accessible, regenerative, and central to wellbeing. Aboriginal leadership was recognised as an essential pathway, alongside sustainable livelihoods, biodiversity protection, and embedding care for Country at the heart of decision-making.

The synthesised issues are as follows.

- Equitable and inclusive access to nature for all communities
- Cultural awareness and recognition of biodiversity values in fostering nature connection
- Green spaces and urban design that promote nature connection among residents
- Integration of nature connection principles into educational programs and curricula
- Strategic communication to raise awareness of nature's value and deepen public engagement
- Sustainable funding mechanisms and strong branding for nature connection initiatives
- Robust community action and political support at both national and local levels, including ways of measuring and monitoring nature connection

This shared vision reinforces the collective call to action. When nature thrives, people thrive connection with nature must become the everyday norm.

Barriers to Overcome

- Time constraints and everyday distractions (e.g., digital device use), pressures, and disconnection reduce engagement.
- Inequities in access: cost, health, geography, and insecure living all limit connection across all age groups.
- Narrow public understanding of nature's value.
- Communication challenges in engaging diverse communities.
- Weak collaboration and lack of cohesion in promoting nature connection.
- Consumption patterns driven by capitalism contributing to ecological degradation and disconnection.
- Ineffective tax systems in addressing environmental depletion or supporting nature connection agendas.
- Siloed systems and vested interests slow change and weaken collaboration.
- Insufficient political will across the federal, state, and local levels.

Pathways Forward

- Legislative and policy reform: treaty, rights for nature, long-term, measuring nature connection in existing frameworks.
- Ecological literacy: embedded in education, health, governance, and community life.
- Scaling proven programs that connect people and nature in safe, inclusive, sustainable ways.

- Elevating nature connection as a national agenda.
- Establishing a “Well-being of Future Generations Act” to support sustainable futures.
- Synergising and coordinating efforts across all levels, from national leaders to local volunteers, all driving change.
- Ensuring sufficient and equitable funding
- Strengthening research and innovation related to nature connection.
- Stories with data: combining evidence with lived experience to inspire and measure impact.
- Empowering community-led efforts.
- Implementing strategic marketing and effective communication to promote nature connection.



Figure 2: The workshop was attended by participants from diverse sectors, including national and local government agencies, non-government organizations, and academia.

Box 1: A Collective Call to Action: Towards a Nature-Connected Future

Australia's wellbeing, identity, and resilience are inseparable from the health of the natural world. A more nature-connected future means children climbing trees, exploring creeks, and learning outdoors as part of everyday life. Elders rest in shaded green spaces within walking distance of their homes, and communities gather in gardens, along waterways, and in cultural places that are cared for and respected. Cities are designed with nature at their heart, featuring tree-lined streets, biophilic buildings, walkable neighbourhoods, and accessible parks supporting biodiversity. Nature is not a luxury or an occasional escape, but the backdrop of daily life, grounding people in belonging, reciprocity, and care.

This vision includes health systems that recognise the benefits of nature connection, prescribing time outdoors as part of holistic care. Local councils embed nature in planning, infrastructure, and community engagement, making nature connection a priority in transport, housing, and recreation. National and state governments align under frameworks that value ecological health alongside social and economic wellbeing, measuring success not in economic growth but in thriving people and thriving Country. First Nations leadership and truth-telling are central, ensuring that Country is cared for with knowledge systems that have guided it for thousands of years.

The barriers to this vision are acknowledged: inequities in access, entrenched political silos, funding cycles that undermine continuity, and cultural narratives that prioritise consumption and growth over care. For many, the pressures of daily life, including housing insecurity, financial stress, and lack of time, create obstacles to engaging fully with nature. Yet nature connection remains fundamental, a foundation for resilience, cultural identity, and human hope that cannot be sidelined.

The pathways forward are diverse but reinforcing. Legislation and policy reforms can embed nature connection into planning schemes, education curricula, and health systems, making it a sustained and measurable priority. Community champions and grassroots initiatives provide local leadership, while councils act as connectors across sectors. Shared stories and impact reporting ensure accountability and bring data to life. Food systems, community gardens, and local agriculture root people in place and build reciprocity. Behavioural nudges, from signage and outdoor events to everyday amenities like benches and shelters, normalise time in nature. National guidelines and consistent monitoring of indicators elevate credibility, while long-term funding and political courage provide stability.

A nature-connected future is possible when these pathways converge. Access to nature becomes equitable and inclusive, ecological literacy becomes universal, and cultural norms shift so that connection is the expectation, not the exception. It is the everyday way of living, caring, and building a future that sustains both people and planet for generations to come.



Summary of workshop

Day 1: Nature Connection and Wellbeing Landscape

The workshop began with a Welcome to Country from Zac Cameron of Melaythenner Teeackana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation (MTWAC), who invited participants to see, feel, and experience Country spiritually, grounding the day in the enduring cultural connection that Aboriginal people hold with Trouwerner / Lutruwita / Tasmania.

Survey data revealed that nature connection also drives action, with those most connected up to 82 times more likely to engage in conservation advocacy and 16 times more likely to make consumer-conscious choices. Barriers such as time poverty, health, cost, and accessibility continue to constrain participation.

Research findings from a national survey of over 4,000 Australians showed strong correlations between nature connection, life satisfaction, and quality-of-life, with highly connected individuals more than four times as likely to report strong life satisfaction and nearly twice as likely to report good quality-of-life.

Policy leaders reflected on the importance of translating research into meaningful, actionable strategy. Panellists called for quantifying the full suite of benefits of nature connection, spanning health, social, environmental, cultural, economic, and tourism outcomes, and called for greater investment in ecological literacy across institutions and communities.

The storytelling project, presented alongside the survey, brought the human and cultural dimensions of connection into focus, revealing how people experience nature through body, mind, spirit, and place. Themes from the stories included childlike wonder, grief, renewal, transformation, and cultural belonging, highlighting that nature connection often functions as a form of healing, resilience, and identity. Indigenous and migrant stories revealed the diversity of meanings that people bring to nature connection, reinforcing the idea that noticing nature often leads to caring for it, and caring for it often inspires action.

Discussions highlighted the value of place-based approaches and the role of community champions as practical vehicles for change, showing that policy translation must connect meaningfully to local contexts and community priorities.

Policy panel members encouraged participants to “stay the course”, recognising that nature connection already has traction in national policy but requires consistent indicators, frameworks, measurement and stronger cross-government integration.

The practitioner panel perspectives session highlighted the need to scale up and sustain programs with proof of concept, noting that effective models already exist and should be resourced for longevity moving beyond “pilot churn” to long-term impact.

Community champions were consistently identified as catalysts for nature connection and social change, though challenges such as short funding cycles and the risks of “one-size-fits-all” approaches remain.

There was advocacy for experiential training for health and clinical workforces so professionals can confidently “prescribe” nature as a pathway to wellbeing.

Practitioners also emphasised that Indigenous knowledge systems and western science must be interwoven in a circular and reinforcing way, forming a stronger foundation for programs and strategies.

Stories reflected both the grief of leaving homelands and the sense of belonging and healing that comes from forming new relationships with Australian landscapes, highlighting nature as a cultural anchor in the process of adaptation and renewal.

Migrant communities shared strong and diverse multicultural perspectives on nature connection, often framed through spirituality, resilience, and cultural renewal. Stories described both the grief of leaving homelands and the healing power of creating belonging through Australian landscapes.

Aboriginal perspectives reinforced that Indigenous knowledge must be systematically embedded in all levels of decision-making, and that truth-telling is an essential foundation for strengthening nature connection.

Aboriginal panellists reflected that when Country is placed at the centre of programs and conversations: the connections between people and nature deepen and flourish.

Participants learned that values are more powerful drivers of attitudes and behaviours than facts alone, and that activating **intrinsic values** such as care, fairness, and self-direction leads to stronger, more enduring support for people–nature relationships than relying on **extrinsic values** like wealth, status, or fear.

The Common Cause values-based communication training introduced participants to the principles of framing messages around shared values rather than relying only on facts, with the goal of inspiring lasting shifts in behaviour and public support for nature connection.

The training highlighted that effective communication for nature must go beyond technical evidence and instead **frame messages in ways that connect personally and culturally** emphasising that humans are part of nature, and showing how nature connection improves health, belonging, and resilience.

Within the workshop, participants reflected that this training was immediately relevant to how they speak about nature connection in their own work. The group recognised that much of the evidence and policy conversation risks being framed in technical or transactional terms. Using values-based communication provides a way to mainstream nature connection by making it meaningful, identity-shaping, and motivating for diverse audiences.

Participants were encouraged to keep messaging **real, hopeful, and solutions-focused**, using tangible language, storytelling, and a clear **Vision→Barrier→Action** structure that starts with the future we want to see, acknowledges what's in the way, and empowers people with the actions needed to get there.



Figure 3. Day 1 panel discussion on policy relevance and information needs for advancing a nature-connected future, with participation from delegates representing government and non-government agencies.



Figure 4. Day 1 panel discussion on practitioner perspectives for advancing a nature-connected future, with participation from practitioners and delegates representing local government and non-government agencies.

Day 2: Creating Impact and Co-designing Pathways

Day 2 moved from evidence to action, beginning with a session with Growth in Mind, on climate grief and eco-anxiety that acknowledged the emotional weight of working in this space (Figure 5). The training session addressed the following key issues.

- The session introduced the *meta-crisis* of environmental and social issues, which has led to widespread experiences of *eco-grief* and *climate anxiety*.
- It explored the five states of acceptance of grief including ignorance, avoidance, doom, all the feelings, acceptance & purpose.
- The session also deepened understanding of the nature of grief—describing it as a form of attachment that can manifest in various emotional states. Grief does not follow a linear path; it can knock us off course, cause us to feel stuck, and requires time and space to be processed and resolved.
- The concept of *active hope*, introduced in the book by Chris Johnstone and Joanna Macy, was presented as a way to address grief. Active hope is not something we passively have—it is a practice we actively engage in. It begins with acknowledging where we are, including the challenges we face. From there, we identify what we hope for in response to those challenges and then take steps toward that direction.
- Hope in the face of grief, environmental issues, and social challenges can arise from various sources. It may come from our actions, our focus on achieving positive outcomes, our acceptance of what can and cannot be changed, the inspiring efforts and examples of others, opportunities that emerge, and innovations within society.
- Actions to address grief can be taken across various domains: through policy and politics, in workplaces and schools, via financial decisions and investments, within homes and consumption behaviours, and through community engagement.
- The concept of *adaptation* was introduced as a way to cope with the meta-crisis, emphasising the importance of building *adaptive capacity* rather than relying solely on technical solutions. Adaptation involves systematic and critical thinking, understanding root causes, fostering mutual support, exploring practical ways to address challenges, strengthening community ties, and reconnecting with nature.

Participants reflected on grief as a natural response to ecological loss, but also as a pathway to resilience when processed collectively and with support. Participants were reminded that resilience comes from recognising grief without being paralysed by it, and by turning towards planning and action rather than despair.

Discussions highlighted that eco-grief is experienced differently across individuals and communities, and that acknowledging it openly can build stronger movements. Practical tools such as perspective-taking, self-knowledge, and community support were shared as ways to sustain wellbeing while continuing to advocate for change. Notes from the discussion can be found in Figure 6.



Figure 5. A training session on Eco-Grief Resilience & Adaptation was facilitated by Steve Willing

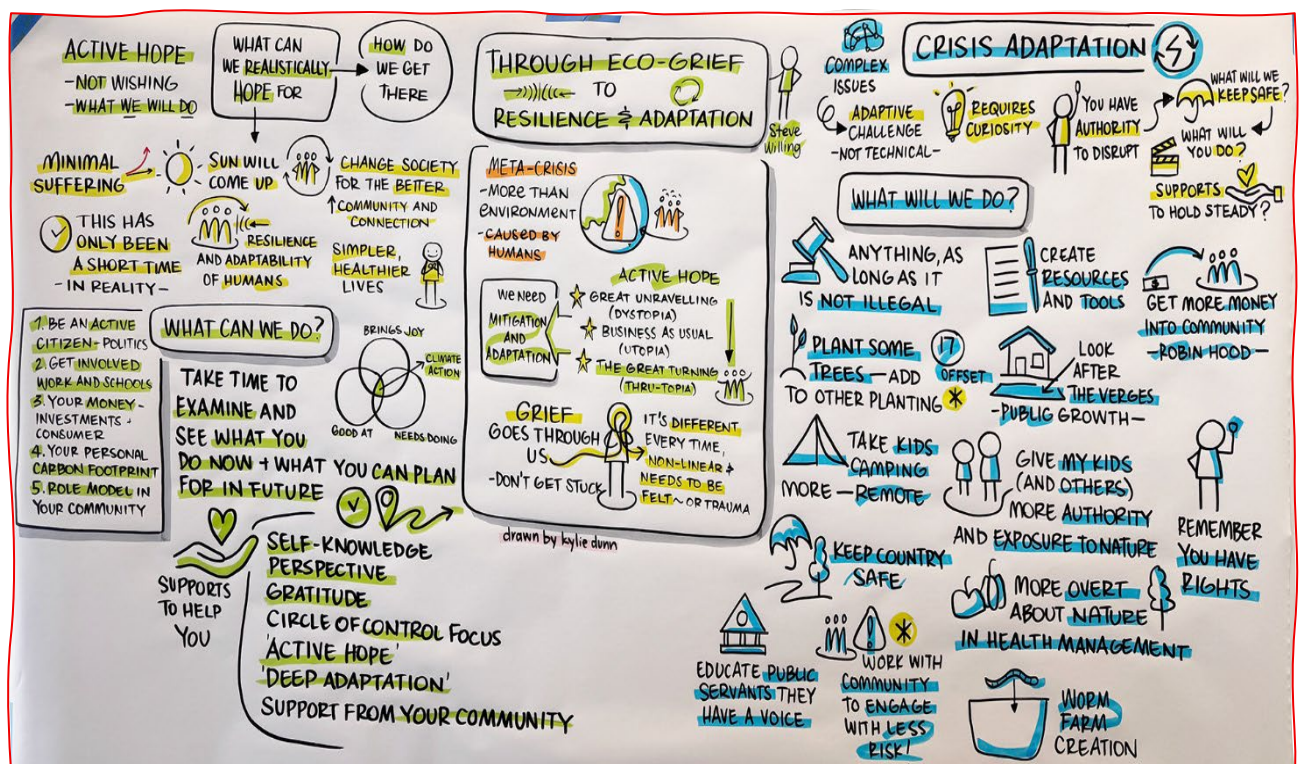


Figure 6. Graphical notes from the training session discussions

The workshop shifted into a panel on **measuring, monitoring, and sharing the progress of nature connection**.

All panellists agreed on the importance of measuring and reporting progress in nature connection. It was emphasised that we must first understand the *purpose* of monitoring—why we are doing it, who it is for, and how the results should influence decision-making.

Why measure and report?

- To raise the profile and recognition of nature connection.
- To inform our understanding of current situations and trends.
- To raise awareness, shape more effective programs, and support better resource allocation.
- To contribute to broader frameworks such as the *State of the Environment* report and climate adaptation strategies.

Principles for effective measurement and reporting:

- It should promote governance and accountability in nature connection enhancement and development.
- A Theory of Change should guide the process, with indicators tailored to different geographical scales.
- Monitoring should be longitudinal, capturing changes over time and incorporating impact assessments.
- Reporting should not be overly academic—it must be accessible, meaningful, and relevant to communities, policymakers, politicians, and other stakeholders.
- Reports should be designed to align with decision-making contexts, reflecting both emotional (heart) and rational (mind) factors.
- Reciprocal information flows are essential—communities should not only contribute data but also gain insights that help deepen their connection to nature.

Methods and tools:

- A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods is needed.
- Incorporating nature connection measurement tools into Official National Statistics will help support it to be monitored more closely over time
- Stories bring data to life, making the findings more relatable and impactful. Storytelling was highlighted as a powerful tool to complement data.
- The use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be a valuable technique for inclusive, meaningful, and impactful monitoring and reporting.

The discussion reinforced that reporting should be designed to match decision-making contexts, that indicators need to reflect both heart and mind factors, and that reciprocal information flows are needed so communities not only provide data but also learn how to connect with nature more deeply. Notes from the discussion can be found in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Graphical notes from the panel discussion on measuring, monitoring and sharing the progress of nature connection in Australia.

A second panel on **transdisciplinary collaboration** emphasised the importance of partnerships across health, education, conservation, and community sectors.

Practical examples of promoting nature connection were shared, highlighting programs and activities from [Kuno Earth](#), [Nature Block](#) of Conservation Volunteers Australia, [Landcare Tasmania](#), and the [Melbourne Business School's business initiatives](#). These initiatives help to foster a deeper understanding of nature connection and sustainability through art, volunteering, and neighbourhood projects. This allows for the bridging of disciplines and engaging diverse audiences.

Speakers noted that effective collaboration relies on building trust, embedding nature into systems like health and education, and scaling efforts without losing local context. Ego, siloed systems, and lack of time were identified as barriers, but strong connectors through individuals and organisations that are able to span boundaries were seen as critical enablers.

Case studies demonstrated how integrating nature experiences into student programs, social housing communities, and business education can help normalise nature connection and embed it into everyday life. These stories underscored the power of imagery, creativity, and shared experiences in mobilising support.

A key success factor in promoting nature connection was transdisciplinary collaboration, particularly partnerships across the health, education, conservation, and community sectors. Speakers emphasised that effective collaboration depends on building trust, embedding nature connection into systems such as health and education, and scaling efforts while maintaining local relevance. Notes from the discussion can be found in Figure 8.



Figure 8. Graphical notes from the panel discussion on transdisciplinary collaboration for nature connection.

Envisioning a More Nature-Connected Future

In the afternoon of Day 2, participants shifted from listening and reflection into visioning and co-design. The session focused on imagining a more nature-connected future, identifying barriers to achieving it, and mapping practical pathways.

Participants were asked to share their vision for a more nature-connected future. The word cloud shows the richness of responses, with recurring aspirations for a future that is inclusive, kind, peaceful, and collaborative, where people live in harmony with nature (Figure 9).

A more nature-connected future would look like . . .



Figure 9. Keywords shared by participants envisioning a nature-connected future.

To capture insights across different scales, the room was divided into groups by 'place': one focused on Australia as a whole system, another on Tasmania at the state level, a third on the role of local government, and a fourth on grassroots and community life. The purpose was to surface bold ideas and concrete steps that could inform future policy, programs, and partnerships, while grounding the work in lived experience and practical action.

Synthesis Group 1: Towards a More Nature-Connected Australia

Vision

The national group began by envisioning a future where nature connection is not fragmented across portfolios or reduced to short-term initiatives, but instead embedded as a coherent, whole-of-system priority. In this future, governments at every level are aligned under a shared framework that recognises nature connection as essential for wellbeing, resilience, and identity. They imagined structural reforms such as a *Future Generations Act*, rights for nature legislation, and treaty processes with First Nations peoples as the backbone of this shift. National policy would consistently reflect the principle that when nature thrives, people thrive.



Barriers

Participants acknowledged that systemic barriers remain formidable. Political cycles often favour short-term wins over long-term investments. Furthermore, powerful vested interests, particularly from industries reliant on extractive models, work actively against ecological priorities. Government departments continue to operate in silos, limiting cross-sectoral collaboration and producing fragmented programs. Media narratives, shaped by both distraction and fear, can undermine public engagement. At the everyday level, barriers are deeply social as well as structural. Participants drew on Maslow's hierarchy of needs to emphasise that people experiencing housing insecurity, financial stress, or food scarcity often struggle to prioritise nature connection, even when they value it deeply.

Pathways

Despite these challenges, participants were clear about the pathways forward. National leadership must drive consistent and measurable indicators for nature connection across government frameworks, including integration into "Measuring What Matters" and State of the Environment reporting. Ecological literacy must become a universal competency, spanning education, healthcare, and governance, so that people across society can understand and act on their relationship with nature. First Nations leadership was seen as fundamental, with Indigenous knowledge systems embedded across decision-making, policy design, and land management practices.

The group emphasised the need for accountability and transparency, ensuring reforms are durable and not subject to political cycles. Participants also called for co-created information systems that feed back to communities, not only gathering data but sharing stories and evidence in ways that build capacity and reciprocity. Finally, cultural change was highlighted as both a pathway and an outcome. Shifting norms so that time in nature is valued, prioritised, and celebrated will help ensure nature connection is not an optional extra but an expected part of Australian life. Together, these pathways outlined a national vision where nature connection is recognised as a right

and responsibility, sustained by structural reform, community empowerment, and cultural transformation.

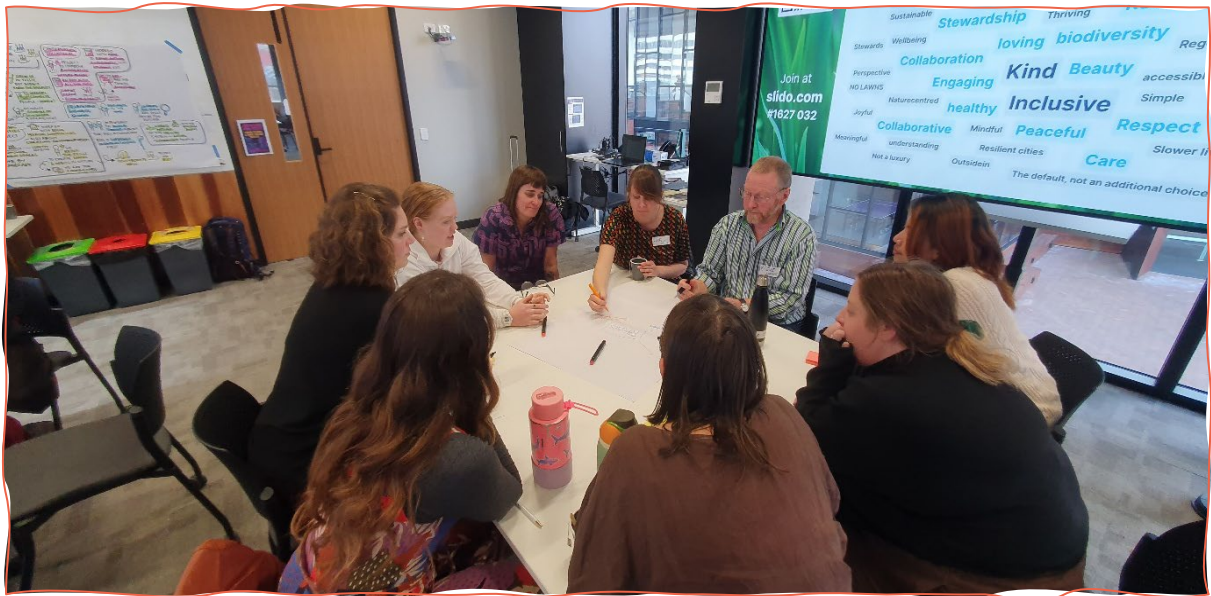


Figure 10. Group discussions among participants focused on nature connection at the national level.

Synthesis Group 2: Towards a More Nature-Connected Tasmania

Vision

The Tasmanian group imagined a future where access to nature is recognised as a right for all Tasmanians, not a privilege for those who can afford it. They pictured cities and towns transformed by urban greening, tree-lined streets, and public spaces that make nature part of everyday life. Schools were seen as key catalysts, embedding outdoor education, bush programs, and nature play into the curriculum so children grow up with connection as the norm. Tasmania's identity as a state would be shaped by pride in its landscapes, biodiversity, and culture of connection.



At the heart of this vision was First Nations leadership. Participants called for stronger co-management of parks and reserves, treaty processes that honour truth-telling, and systemic recognition of Aboriginal knowledge and stewardship. Indicators of success would measure diverse forms of connection, from participation in cultural programs to time outdoors, rather than relying solely on visitor numbers to national parks, which risk overuse. In this vision, Tasmania leads by example, showing how a small jurisdiction can model integrated, community-led approaches to connection.

Barriers

Barriers were seen as both structural and cultural. Inequitable access to nature persists, with many Tasmanians facing costs or physical limitations that prevent them from enjoying natural spaces. Policy silos and bureaucratic inertia slow progress, while short-term political and funding cycles undermine continuity. Extractive industries and vested interests remain powerful voices in Tasmanian politics, working against longer-term ecological priorities. Cost-of-living pressures make it harder for families to prioritise nature, especially when connection is framed in consumptive or tourism terms. Participants also noted a cultural mindset that positions nature as secondary or optional, limiting momentum for systemic change.

Pathways

The pathways identified were ambitious yet practical. Sustained funding for rangers, parks, and community programs was a consistent theme. Embedding ecological literacy in schools and public health campaigns would normalise connection across generations. Transparent reforms and clearer communication from government could build trust and demonstrate progress. Storytelling and reporting back to communities would ensure accountability and maintain energy. Collaboration with the private sector, particularly companies motivated by environmental, social, and governance requirements, was seen as a potential enabler. Participants concluded that Tasmania's pathway forward rests on treaty, education, long-term funding, and a cultural shift towards reciprocity with Country. In doing so, Tasmania could establish itself as a leader in embedding nature connection across systems and daily life.



Figure 11. Group discussions among participants focused on nature connection at the state level.

Synthesis Group 3: Towards More Nature-Connected Municipalities

Vision

The local government group envisioned councils as catalysts for embedding nature connection into the heart of community life. Their vision was of councils treating connection as a core responsibility across planning, infrastructure, health, and cultural programs. In this future, nature is not considered separate but integrated into “business as usual”: libraries become hubs for connection, community conversations are held outdoors in parks, and local arts projects reflect and celebrate the natural environment. Councils act as convenors, bringing communities together and demonstrating leadership by modelling connection through their own strategies and operations.



Barriers

Barriers identified were both practical and political. Funding constraints limit what councils can deliver, with many dependent on competitive grants or stretched ratepayer bases. Liability concerns and risk-averse cultures stifle innovation and outdoor programming. Short-term thinking and limited ecological literacy within councillors and senior staff were seen as obstacles to embedding connection into decision-making. Working in silos (both across council departments and between councils and other levels of government) weakens efforts and impact. Participants also acknowledged that many community members face disconnection due to time pressures, competing priorities, or lack of awareness, which reduces participation in local initiatives.

Pathways

The pathways suggested reflected the unique strengths of local government. Building ecological literacy across elected representatives and council staff was considered essential, ensuring that decision-makers are equipped to embed nature in planning and policy. Councils should gather and share both data and stories, demonstrating the benefits of nature connection in ways that resonate with communities and higher levels of government. Community engagement strategies could be transformed by holding outdoor yarning circles and conversations, embedding nature into the process as well as the outcome. Arts and cultural activities were identified as particularly powerful tools for engaging diverse communities and normalising connection.

Participants also highlighted the role of champions: councillors, community leaders, and volunteers who can advocate for and model nature connection within their local contexts. Cross-departmental collaboration within councils, integrating nature into transport, housing, health, and recreation planning, was seen as a key enabler. By treating nature connection as a shared value that improves health, resilience, and liveability, councils could take a leading role in shaping communities where connection to nature is both accessible and celebrated.



Figure 12. Group discussions among participants focused on nature connection at the local government level.

Synthesis Group 4: Towards More Nature-Connected Communities

Vision

The grassroots group imagined a future where connection to nature is woven into the fabric of daily life, supported by communities that are resilient, creative, and locally grounded. In this vision, schools are central, with children learning outdoors, engaging in nature play, and participating in food-in-schools programs that build habits of stewardship early. Food systems anchor connection, with community gardens, crop swaps, and local agriculture providing shared experiences that tie people to place. Storytelling sustains cultural continuity, passing on values and practices of connection across generations. Communities thrive not just through contact with nature, but through the relationships that are strengthened around it.



Barriers

Barriers were acknowledged as significant. Access remains inequitable, with physical, financial, and social obstacles preventing some people from engaging fully with green spaces. Everyday distractions and competing priorities (such as technology and work pressures) reduce the time and attention available for connection. Unequal distribution of public versus private greenspace entrenches inequity, and grassroots initiatives

often struggle with short-term, competitive funding models that undermine continuity. Liability concerns and risk aversion also constrain what communities can do, while the absence of strong policy support leaves local energy unsupported.

Pathways

The pathways forward were framed in three layers. First, explicit structural changes such as biophilic design in infrastructure, walkable neighbourhoods, and the integration of green space into urban planning. Second, organic change led by local champions, volunteers, and influencers who model and encourage everyday connection. Third, behavioural nudges that make connection simple and habitual, from signage and creative prompts to community events and accessible amenities like toilets, benches, and shelters that enable people to stay outdoors longer.

Food and culture were highlighted as particularly powerful levers. Community gardens and food-sharing programs build reciprocity with nature and strengthen social ties, while creative arts and nature-linked cultural projects make connection visible and engaging. Training and succession planning ensure initiatives endure beyond individual leaders, maintaining momentum across generations. Participants concluded that the grassroots pathway to a more nature-connected future lies in embedding small, everyday opportunities for connection. When reinforced by shared stories, visible champions, and supportive infrastructure, these micro-moments accumulate into a cultural norm where being connected to nature is simply part of who communities are.



Figure 13. Group discussions among participants focused on nature connection at the community level.

Overall Synthesis

The key common points can be summarised from the outcomes of the four group discussions below and illustrated through the notes in Figures 14 and 15.

Vision

- Equitable and inclusive access to nature for all communities
- Cultural awareness and recognition of biodiversity values in fostering nature connection
- Green spaces and urban design that promote nature connection among residents
- Integration of nature connection principles into educational programs and curricula
- Strategic communication to raise awareness of nature's value and deepen public engagement
- Sustainable funding mechanisms and strong branding for nature connection initiatives
- Robust community action and political support at both national and local levels, including ways of measuring and monitoring nature connection

Barriers

- Time constraints and everyday distractions (e.g., digital device use), pressures, and disconnection reduce engagement.
- Inequities in access: cost, health, geography, and insecure living all limit connection across all age groups.
- Narrow public understanding of nature's value.
- Communication challenges in engaging diverse communities.
- Weak collaboration and lack of cohesion in promoting nature connection.
- Consumption patterns driven by capitalism contributing to ecological degradation and disconnection.
- Ineffective tax systems in addressing environmental depletion or supporting nature connection agendas.
- Siloed systems and vested interests slow change and weaken collaboration.
- Insufficient political will across the federal, state, and local levels.

Pathways

- Legislative and policy reform: treaty, rights for nature, long-term, measuring nature connection in existing frameworks.
- Ecological literacy: embedded in education, health, governance, and community life.
- Scaling proven programs that connect people and nature in safe, inclusive, sustainable ways.
- Elevating nature connection as a national agenda.
- Establishing a "Well-being of Future Generations Act" to support sustainable futures.
- Synergising and coordinating efforts across all levels, from national leaders to local volunteers, all driving change.
- Ensuring sufficient and equitable funding
- Strengthening research and innovation related to nature connection.

- Stories with data: combining evidence with lived experience to inspire and measure impact.
- Empowering community-led efforts.
- Implementing strategic marketing and effective communication to promote nature connection.



Figure 14. Breakout group participants brainstorming and consolidating visions, barriers, and pathways for achieving a nature-connected future in Australia.

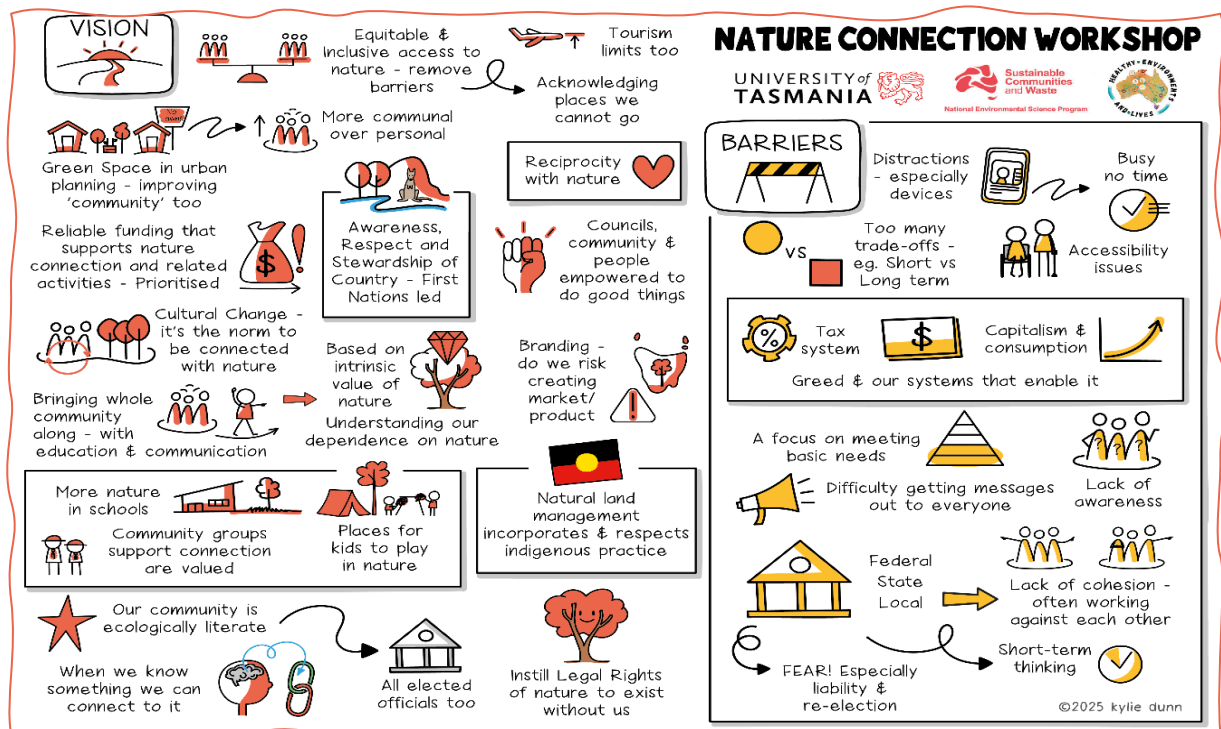


Figure 15. Graphic notes capturing collective visions from all group discussions on envisioning a nature-connected future.

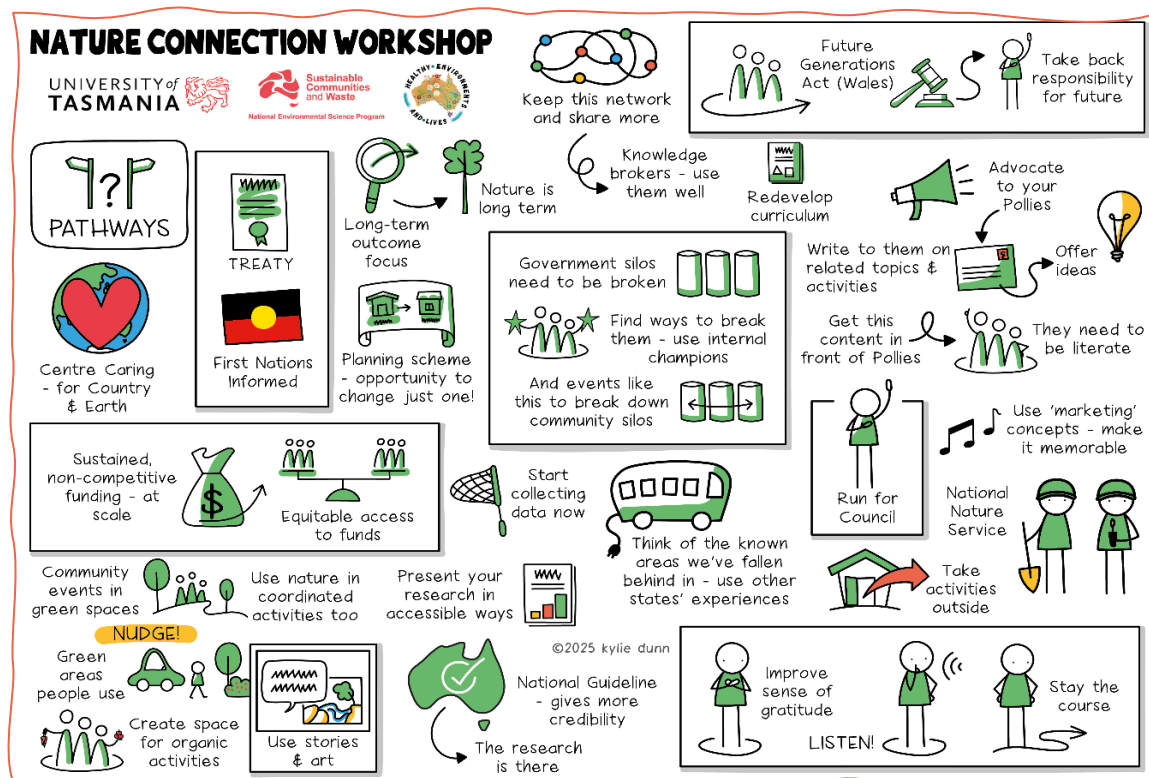


Figure 16. Graphic notes capturing collective visions from all group discussions on creating a nature-connected future.

Conclusion and next step

The workshop achieved its intended outputs by identifying visions, barriers, and pathways for a nature connected future. This entailed collaboration, engagement and shared decision-making among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders from various organisations in Tasmania and across Australia.

The co-designed pathways aimed to promote more nature-connected communities by incorporating diverse perspectives, including legal and political support, knowledge sharing and development, collaboration, strategic communication, community engagement, and wellbeing upskilling. Many of these strategies were used in the workshop design and contributed significantly to the workshop's success in meeting its outcomes.

As the next step, the project team will summarise and share the findings from the workshop for co-design and revision by workshop participants before a final version can be made public. Insights from the workshop can also be used as input for future research, and used to prepare policy briefs, recommendations and submissions to relevant government agencies at both state and federal levels.

Appendix 1: List of Attendees

First name	Surname	Organisation
Amber	Tsai	University Of Tasmania
Amie	Gillies	Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
Andi	Dickmeyer	University of Newcastle
Annika	Stensland	University of Ottawa
Ariane	Moore	University of Tasmania
Bassie	Limenih	University of Tasmania
Ben	Masterman	Wellington Park Management Trust
Blythe	Neville	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Bridget	Jupe	Kingborough Council
Bronte	Scott	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Cameron	Bell	University of Tasmania
Cameron	McLennan	Department of Premier and Cabinet
Cathy	Alexander	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Corinna	Gosby	Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water
Daphne	Bruggemann	University of Tasmania
Dibas	Panta	Sorell Council
Dirk	Welsford	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Eleanor	Fisher	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Ellie	Biggs	University of Western Australia
Emily	Flies	University of Tasmania
Erin	Kirsch	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Fathima Affaf	Wafa	University of Tasmania
Funmi	Akindejoye	University of Tasmania
Gary	Veale	Melbourne business school
Georgie	Opie	Tasmanian Health Service Hospitals South
Gillian	Vogel	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Isabelle	Coster	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Isabelle	Hawton	Climate Change Office, ReCFIT, Tasmanian Government
Janet	Shelley	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Jason	Mundy	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Jasper	Montana	Australian National University
Jenny	Styger	University of Tasmania
Jessie	Fitzgibbon	Landcare Tasmania
Kanchana	Wiset	University of Tasmania
Kate	Vincent	University of Tasmania
Kate	Sollis	University of Tasmania

First name	Surname	Organisation
Kate	Garvey	CMHW, Statewide Mental Health Services
Keira	Pennington	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Leanne	Cleaver	Department of Health Tasmania
Lily	van Eeden	RMIT University
Loryn	Silbernagel	Relationships Australia Tasmania
Lyndon	O'Neil	Melaythenner Teeackana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation
Malcolm	Johnson	Huon Valley Council
Matt	Lancaster	Nature Moves Me / Participate Tasmania
Megan	Fabian	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Melissa	Mykytiuk	Department of Biodiversity Conservation & Attractions
Michael	Helman	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Miles	Holmes	NatureFix
Naomi	Shepherd	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Natalie	Stoeckl	University of Tasmania
Paul	Sutton	University of Denver
Penny	Johnson	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Phill	Pullinger	Kuno Earth
Prystynne	Alexander	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Renae	Riviere	Conservation Volunteers Australia
Robert	Markham	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Ruby	Faithfull	Department of climate change energy environment and water
Steve	Willing	Growth in Mind
Sue	Jakes	Nature Based Therapies Australia
Suellen	Smosinski	University of Tasmania
Tahlia	Rossi	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Tristan	Verhoeff	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Usitha	Rajeevan	University of Tasmania
Zelinda	Sherlock	City of Hobart