



**Sustainable
Communities
and Waste**

National Environmental Science Program



A national survey on Nature Connection:

Nature connection and pro-environmental behaviours in Australia

A summary for policy-makers

November 2025

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As part of the Sustainable People-Environment Interactions theme
(SuPERInteract) of the Sustainable Waste and Communities Hub

Photo: Lara Jameson on Pexels



Why explore nature connection?

Studies around the world have shown that people who are more connected with nature are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behavioursⁱ, highlighting its importance as a leverage point for sustainabilityⁱⁱ. This is why it features prominently in a number of conservation policies, including Australia's Strategy for Nature. Nature connection has multiple dimensions – in our study, we measure it through the three dimensions of identity, experience and philosophy.ⁱⁱⁱ While the health and wellbeing benefits of physical activity in nature are well documented, connecting with nature cognitively and emotionally, such as by observing nature through a window or in a nature can have significant benefits for physical health^{iv}, wellbeing^v and pro-environmental behaviours^{vi}. For these reasons, enhancing nature connection is crucial for improving both the wellbeing of people and planet.

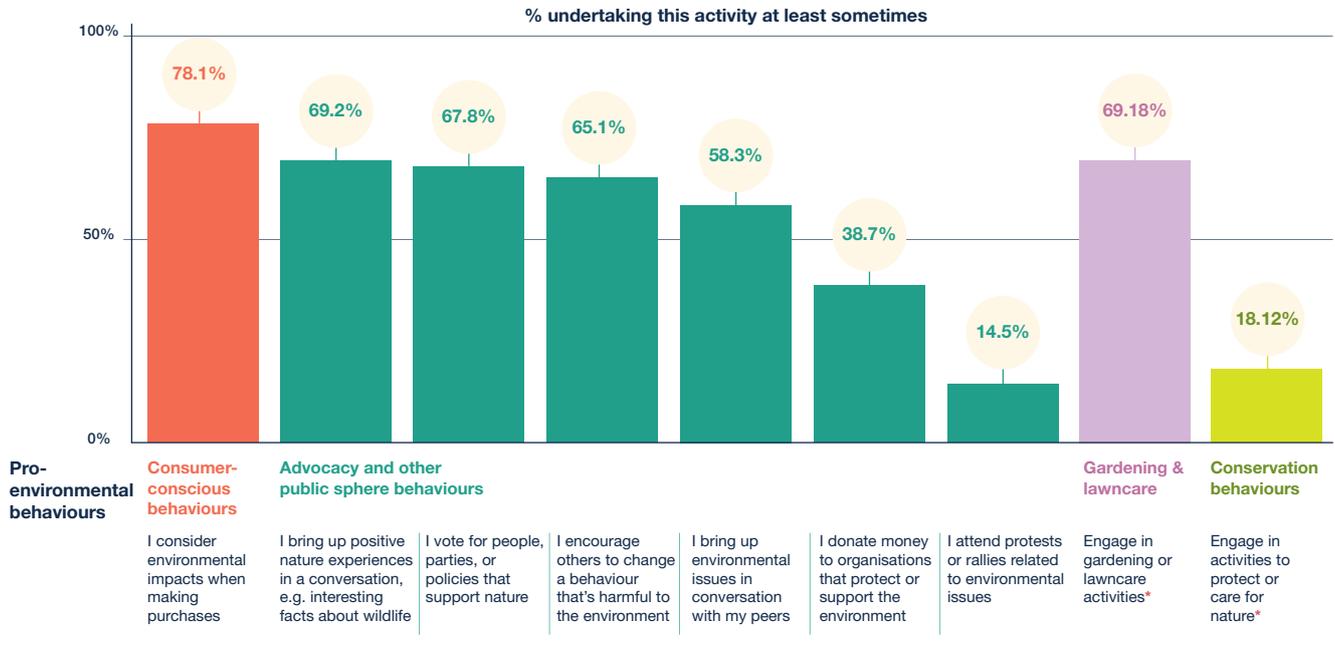
About the Nature Connection Project

While nature connection has been explored internationally, we know little about how nature connection – and its relationship with wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours - varies across Australian geographies and demographics. The nature connection project fills this gap by exploring the diverse ways Australians connect with nature and how this relates to their wellbeing and pro-environmental behaviours. In this short report, we share some of the findings from a nationally representative survey on nature connection. This summary report draws from an academic paper available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-025-02233-6>.



What type of pro-environmental behaviours are Australians engaged in?

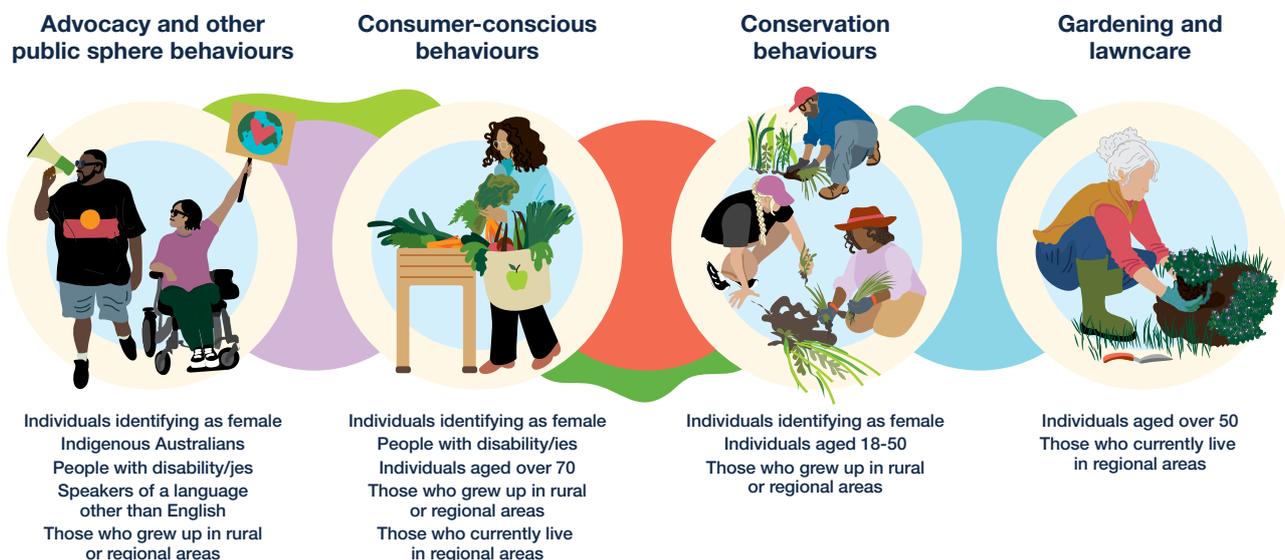
Individuals engage in varied types of pro-environmental behaviours (PEBs), with some more frequently engaged in than others. The type of behaviour most commonly engaged in was consumer-conscious behaviours (78%), followed by certain types of advocacy behaviours such as bringing up positive nature experiences in conversation (69%). A large proportion of individuals in Australia engage in gardening or lawncare activities (69%), while only 18% engage in activities to protect or care for nature. Examples of some of the pro-environmental behaviours are reported below:



*These questions were part of a separate scale, which asked whether individuals had engaged in these activities at least once in the last two years within a range of different environments.

Who is more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviours?

Different groups are more likely to engage in different types of PEBs. For example, younger people are more likely to engage in advocacy and conservation behaviours, while older Australians are more likely to engage in consumer-conscious behaviours and gardening. These findings highlight that the motives and purposes of engaging in PEBs is nuanced, with different groups having diverse reasons for, and ways of, protecting nature.



PEB engagement associated with higher nature connection and wellbeing

All types of pro-environmental behaviours were significantly associated with nature connection, even when controlling for a range of socio-demographic variables. PEBs were also significantly associated with life satisfaction, however these relationships were largely explained by the fact that nature connection is closely associated with wellbeing (and those who engage in PEBs inherently tend to have higher nature connection which is a strong predictor of wellbeing). However, those who engaged in advocacy and other public sphere behaviours had significantly higher life satisfaction, even when controlling for nature connection (and a range of socio-demographic variables).

Individuals with the **highest levels of nature connectedness** are:



82 times more likely to engage in advocacy and public sphere behaviours



4 times more likely to engage in conservation behaviours



16 times more likely to engage in consumer-conscious behaviours



1.8 times more likely to engage in gardening or lawncare activities

Compared to those with the lowest levels of nature connectedness

Policy recommendations

Governments in Australia can leverage policy reform to enhance both engagement in pro-environmental behaviours and nature connection for enhanced wellbeing. Exemplar policies include Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037, which presents a 20-year strategy for the future of biodiversity including a central role for people connecting with nature and acting to protect it.^{vii} The associated Environmental Volunteering Plan focusses on engaging and empowering young people, regional communities, First Nations and Traditional Owner groups, and pathways and communications to appeal to diverse audiences.^{viii}

Nationally, Australia's Strategy for Nature, has at its #1 goal 'to connect all Australians with nature', recognising the links between connecting with nature and acting to protect it. The Strategy underlines the critical role of nature in urban areas to "enrich cities" and provide more opportunities for people to experience, connect with, and undertake nature activities.^{ix} In response to such policies, governments have been investing in innovative and inclusive ways of connecting communities to nature and empowering them to engage in PEBs. For example, the Victoria Nature Festival (2019-2022) and Nature Festival South Australia (as Among It 2018-2019; 2020 onwards) directly emerged from state government biodiversity policies and include diverse content designed to engage across communities, in creative and accessible ways, for fun and meaningful nature experiences.

Although the extent to which such initiatives reach audiences with lower connection to nature is less clear, they still bring visibility to the crucial role of nature connection in our lives and for the planet, and as such, part of a broader societal shift. Further research could explore the impacts of such programs and identify pathways for a more nature-connective, environmentally-protective and life-satisfied population. Given that nature connection is a crucial leverage point for sustainability as part of broader systems shifts, policies and programs that connect people with nature in ways that benefit the environment and wellbeing should be part of business as usual for all governments, businesses, and communities across society.

A note on our methodology

This short report draws on analysis from a survey with over 4,000 people across Australia conducted in July 2023. Here we measure PEBs through a scale measuring engagement in advocacy and other public sphere activities, and single-item measures on consumer-conscious behaviours, conservation activities, and gardening or lawncare. Nature connection was measured using a 12-questions scale (CN-12), and life satisfaction was measured through the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI). The CN-12 and PWI were developed and validated in Australia. All findings are based on multi-variate regression models, with a number of socio-demographic variables used as controls. The full methodology and results are available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-025-02233-6>.

Acknowledgement

The Sustainable Communities and Waste Hub is funded by the Australian Government under the National Environmental Science Program. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to Traditional Owners, their cultures and their Elders past and present. Our Indigenous research partners and partnerships are a valued and respected component of our National Environmental Science Program research.

Acknowledgement of Country (Tasmania)

We acknowledge the Palawa/Pakana peoples, the traditional owners and custodians of Lutruwita/Tasmania and the land upon which the University of Tasmania was built. We acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and continue to maintain their identity, culture and Indigenous rights. We also recognise the value of continuing Aboriginal knowledge and cultural practice, in particular the practices of caring for Country and Aboriginal land management and support the sovereignty of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community over land and sea. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, to those who never made Elder status and to the Spirit of this remarkable land.

Citation

Sollis, K., van Eeden, L. M., Rajeevan, U., Lee, K., Lin, B. B., Keniger, L., Klippan, L., Marsh, P* & Flies, E. J.* (2024). A national survey on Nature Connection: Nature connection and pro-environmental behaviours in Australia. A summary for policy-makers. University of Tasmania. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.25959/30083605>
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