



**Sustainable
Communities
and Waste**

National Environmental Science Program

A national survey on Nature Connection:

Nature connection and wellbeing in Australia

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

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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.

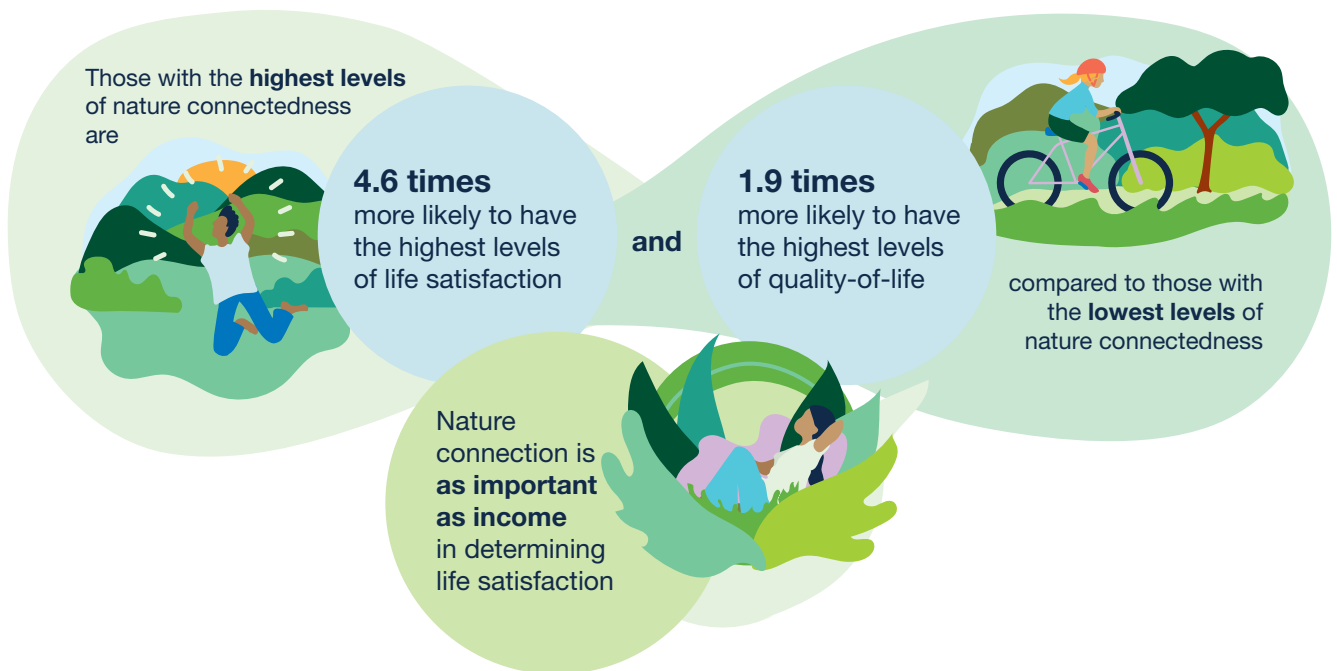
About the Nature Connection Project

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/10.31235/osf.io/s74k9>.



Life satisfaction: Nature connection as important as income

Nature connection was important in predicting wellbeing through both life satisfaction and health-related quality-of-life. Surprisingly, given the well-known and pervasive impacts of income on wellbeing, the link between nature connection and life satisfaction was of similar strength to that of personal income and life satisfaction.



Different dimensions of wellbeing

Nature connection was related to all dimensions of life satisfaction: standard of living, health, achieving in life, personal relationships, safety, feeling part of a community, and future security.

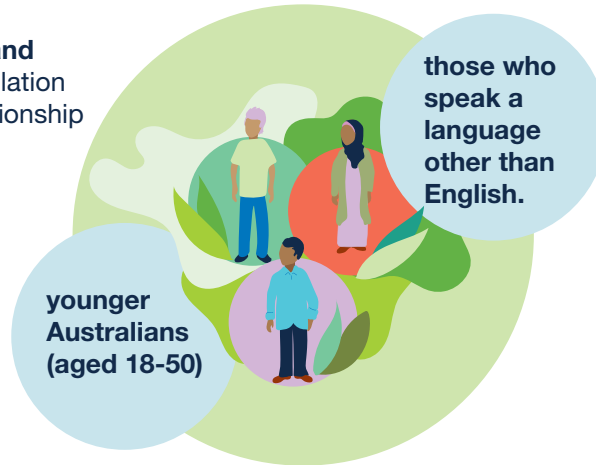



Nature connection was related to the health-related quality-of-life dimensions of independent living, relationships, coping, and senses, but not pain or mental health. While some previous literature points to a link between mental health and nature connection, that work largely focuses on nature contact rather than connection as we have done. Additional analysis on our survey data suggests that even though the mental health dimension is not associated with nature *connection*, it does have a significant positive association with nature *contact*. This relationship warrants further exploration in Australia.

Different population groups

Nature connection and life satisfaction were strongly correlated for most groups. It was particularly strong for younger Australians and those who speak a language other than English. With young people often having poor mental health outcomes, these results highlight the potential of nature connection to enhance wellbeing for this under-explored group.

There is a **strong correlation between nature connection and life satisfaction** for most population groups we examined. The relationship was particularly strong for:



 Due to small sample size, Indigenous Australians could not be examined in this component of the analysis

Policy recommendations

Recognising the wellbeing benefits of connecting with nature could result in broader and longer-term social benefits. While many governments have policies and strategies to improve biodiversity and wellbeing, they often sit with different government departments, hindering the realisation of shared benefits. Reducing silos and better integrating environmental and wellbeing policies could contribute to systemic change that results in broader and longer-term benefits for society, environments and sustainability. For example, urban greening policies, nature-based solutions and efforts to make parks and outdoor activities more accessible can bridge these divides and advance wellbeing and sustainability. Exemplar policies include *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037* and the City of Melbourne's *Living in the City Strategy*.

In addition to this, a greater policy focus on connecting people in Australia with nature will go a long way in improving the wellbeing of individuals, as well as supporting planetary health. For example, increasing funding for programs that help facilitate nature access, and enhancing education around the benefits of nature connection can support changes at an individual-level that help achieve improvements in societal-level wellbeing.

Our research has shown that nature connection can help to support wellbeing for all individuals, through enhanced life satisfaction and health-related quality-of-life. This strong relationship highlights the value in using nature connection as a metric for societal and sustainable wellbeing, which should be incorporated into reports, frameworks and strategies such as Australia's Strategy for Nature, the Australian State of the Environment Report, and the Measuring What Matters framework. With society facing worsening mental health outcomes^{vii}, and ongoing environmental degradation^{viii}, nature connection has an important role to play in creating positive change for both people and planet.

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 nature connection using a 12-questions scale (CN-12). We incorporated two measures of wellbeing: life satisfaction measured through the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI), and health-related quality of life measured through the AQoL-6D. Both scales 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/10.31235/osf.io/s74k9>.

Acknowledgement

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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

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