



**Sustainable
Communities
and Waste**

National Environmental Science Program

Nature Connection Tasmania 2022: a codesign outcomes report

Tasmania, July 2022

Sustainable People–Environment Interactions (IP1) team at the University
of Tasmania¹



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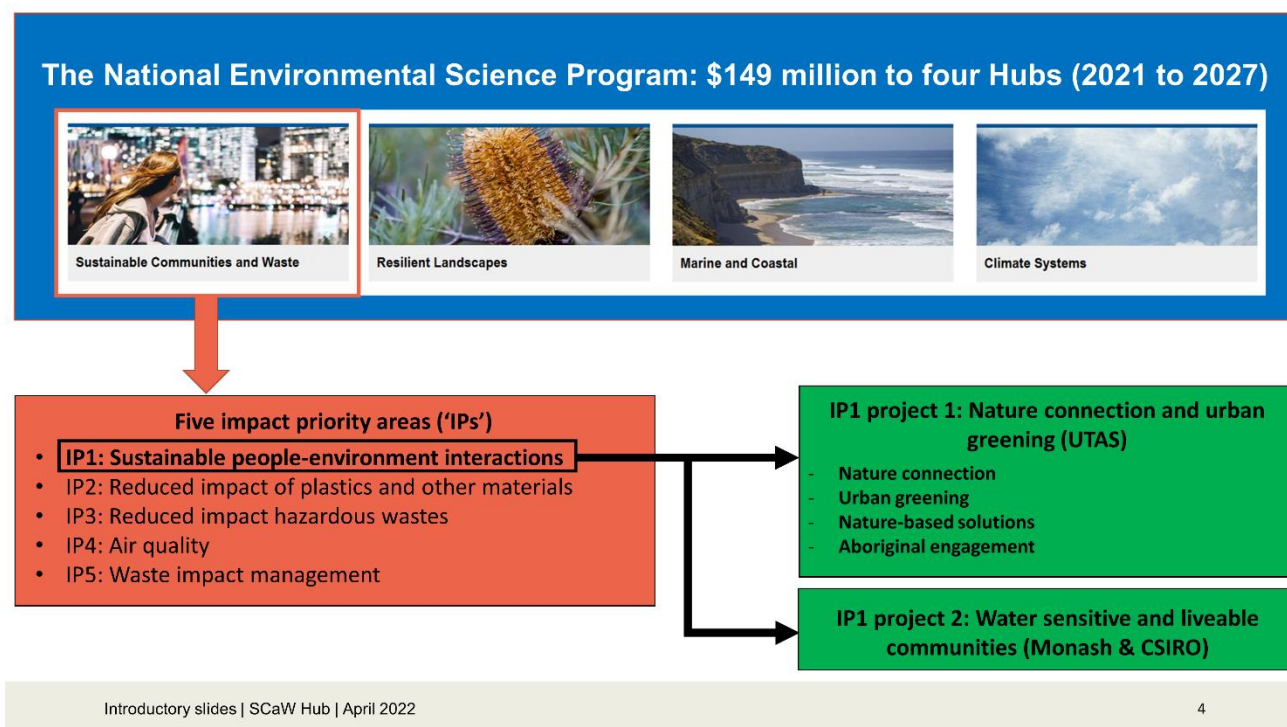
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NESP Overview

The Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program (NESP) contains a number of 'hubs', one of which is the Sustainable Communities and Waste (SCaW) Hub. One of the five theme areas of the Hub is the Sustainable People–Environment Interactions (SuPErInteract) – a consortium of leading research institutions and partners across industry, government and community groups. A key outcome of SuPErInteract will be the development of practical tools, methods and information to enable sustainable people–environment interactions in liveable urban, regional and remote communities.

The **Nature Connection Project** is one of the SuPErInteract group's key research project areas.



Workshop Summary

The Nature Connection Project aims to generate local, innovative, action research that drives positive environmental and social changes – to improve employment, education, health and sustainability.

Specifically, the project aims to:

1. Design a coordinated, long-term research strategy with and for local partners that delivers meaningful and valuable evidence demonstrating the impacts of nature connection/nature-based activities/urban greening/other nature-based solutions on human and environmental health and wellbeing and sustainability.

2. Ensure the proposed research will investigate relevant issues and generate useful evidence that drives positive environmental and social change – including in the areas of employment, education, health and sustainability.
3. Bring together individuals and organisations working in the people/nature space to identify opportunities, shared research goals and research project opportunities.

In 2022, SuPERInteract co-designed its 2023 research plan through workshops with research partners across government, business, the non-government sector, and communities. As part of that process, on the 13th of July, 2022, SuPERInteract conducted a workshop at Spring Bay Mill, Triabunna. At this workshop, some of Tasmania's 'nature connectors' gathered together to think about what a state-based Nature Connection research project might look like and continue to co-design . We sought to identify shared research needs, goals and opportunities.

There were 25 attendees at the workshop, from 15 different organisations. Attending organisations represented: local and national nature conservation, connection and restoration, Aboriginal community, local council, academia and other National Environmental Science Program Hubs.

This report is a summary of the process and outcomes of that workshop. We hope the report captures not only the substance of that gathering, but also its optimistic spirit and sense of urgency and enthusiasm.



Smoking Ceremony

I'd like to talk about my firestick. It's using our traditional bark from our country, the paperbark.

I have four bindings. In no order, three of the bindings represent three of our family groups today, being the Bass Strait Island Cape Barron mob, the Fanny Cochrane Smith mob, and, for me, my mob, the Briggs or Dolly Dalrymple mob.

But there is one more binding here. It's small, it's weak, it's fragile, but it's in my hand, and that's where I can wrap the care and support around those people...trying to come back from the impacts of colonisation.

Rob Anders

Why Nature Connection?

Part philosophy and part practice, 'nature connection' refers to our human affinity with non-human nature, and the associated emotions and behaviours of this integration.

Background

When people are connected with nature they are more likely to experience positive impacts on health and wellbeing, feel socially connected and demonstrate pro-environmental behaviours. People that score highly in nature connectedness also tend to score highly on measures of eudemonic wellbeing (personal growth, autonomy, purpose in life, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, positive relations to others and vitality), suggesting that they are flourishing and performing well psychologically (Pritchard et al., 2020). Nature

connectedness is also associated with greater happiness (positive affect) and satisfaction in life (Pritchard et al., 2020).

However, the way we understand nature connection varies according to how we understand ourselves as humans, how we understand non-human nature, and of course the separation or connection between the two: all one and the same, a human/nature hierarchy, or anything in between. Unlike in Western world views (epistemologies), spiritual and pragmatic understandings of human/nature connections are less clearly delineated amongst First Nations.

How, when and if we 'connect' varies. We might connect via:

- Immersion/ 'Bathing'
- Caring for/being on Country
- Bushwalking
- Bird counting
- Restoring

And also,

- Fishing
- Wood hooking
- Hunting
- Furniture making
- Art
- Designing sufi gardens

Connection to nature, we know, is positively affected by use and experience in and with nature, but these are variously affected by access, engagement and exposure factors. Additional influences are emerging in the research, such as genetics, nature orientation, environmental quality, and socio-cultural and sensory (non-material) factors. And personal nature connection can change through life: it is shaped by experiences in our childhood but also throughout our whole lives.

Disconnection from nature is driven by four key factors:

1. No opportunity: usually due to cities, but is also a feature of regional and rural areas due to land degradation and landscape simplification
2. No access: due to disability, age, mental ill health – living interior lives
3. No desire: due to adolescence, being distracted by other things (couches, TVs), but also due to fear (biophobia)
4. No point: There is research emerging about the disillusionment that people are feeling about our ability to save the planet – due to climate change and pandemics primarily. We can understand this as solastalgia – the melancholy caused by the unwelcome changes in the environment.

Why do we care? Nature connection benefits not only human health, but also the health of the planet. It predicts people's attitudes and behaviours towards sustainability; research shows that a stronger psychological connection with nature can lead to greater pro-environmental behaviours. Experiences that support feelings of 'belonging' in nature or valuing nature in emotional and ethical ways are influential in creating connections that support sustainable behaviours. Increasing people's connection to nature is required for effective species and ecological community management and recovery (Soga et al., 2016).

In the Sustainable Communities and Waste Hub, we have the opportunity to undertake a long-term research project that will help understand the ways we connect to nature, the impacts of people–nature connections, and the importance for future policy and practices.

We connect to nature in many different ways, from strolling the urban green spaces in Launceston to climbing mountains in the deep South West. We take care of our local lagoons, beaches and roadside verges. We fish and hunt and protect. We plant trees, restore and revegetate our yards, green our streets and diversify the landscape.

However, it can be challenging to measure, understand and articulate the importance and significance of our connections.

The premise underpinning Australia's Strategy for Nature is twofold: When people value nature they will a) ensure the long-term sustainability of natural environments and b) optimise nature's potential for improving quality of life and well-being.

But valuing nature must be, at least in part, dependent on a human affinity to and connection with non-human nature – physical, emotional or otherwise. How do we make sense of this relationship between valuing, connecting and benefiting nature – humans and non-human both? We also know there are issues around equity, access and effectiveness for all – and these need to be explored and understood in order to make the most of connecting to nature.



TASMANIAN NATURE CONNECTION PROJECT

13 JULY 2022

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Nature Connection

ooo You ARE ALL
M NATURE
CONNECTORS
ALREADY

"Human affinity with
non-human nature..."

— much more complex
with differing perceptions —

Access
engagement
+ exposure

- I feel...
Lack of
'opportunity'
to connect



WHEN, HOW
AND IF WE
CONNECT

using nature for
education brings
another dimension
for kids who struggle

WHY?

Might save us
and the planet

ooo M

Significant
physical, mental,
emotional +
social health
outcomes



NESP National
Environmental
Science
Program

PHASE 2 Hubs

- Marine and Coastal •
- Resilient Landscapes •
- Climate Systems •

and ours

SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES
& WASTE (SCaW)

NESP HUBS
FEED INTO GOV. POLICY

We've done
the plans &
approvals

NOW IT'S
TIME FOR
YEAR 2

CO-DESIGN

SUSTAINABLE
PEOPLE-ENVIRONMENT
INTERACTIONS

Other SCaW impact
priority areas
Plastics
Hazardous Waste
Air Quality
Waste Systems

Workshop leadership team

Welcome to Country and Indigenous facilitator *Rob Anders*

Workshop facilitator *Kym Goodes, 3P Advisory*

Tasmanian Nature Connection Project lead *Pauline Marsh*

NESP SCaW Hub IP1 co-lead *Emily Flies*

Urban Greening Project lead *Jason Byrne*

Visual notetaker *Kylie Dunn, Dinkylune*

Structure of the day

Welcome to country and Yarning Circle

Introduction to the Workshop

Overview of NESP and the Sustainable Communities and Waste Hub

Nature Connection in a nutshell

Lunch

Roundtable Research Brainstorming Session



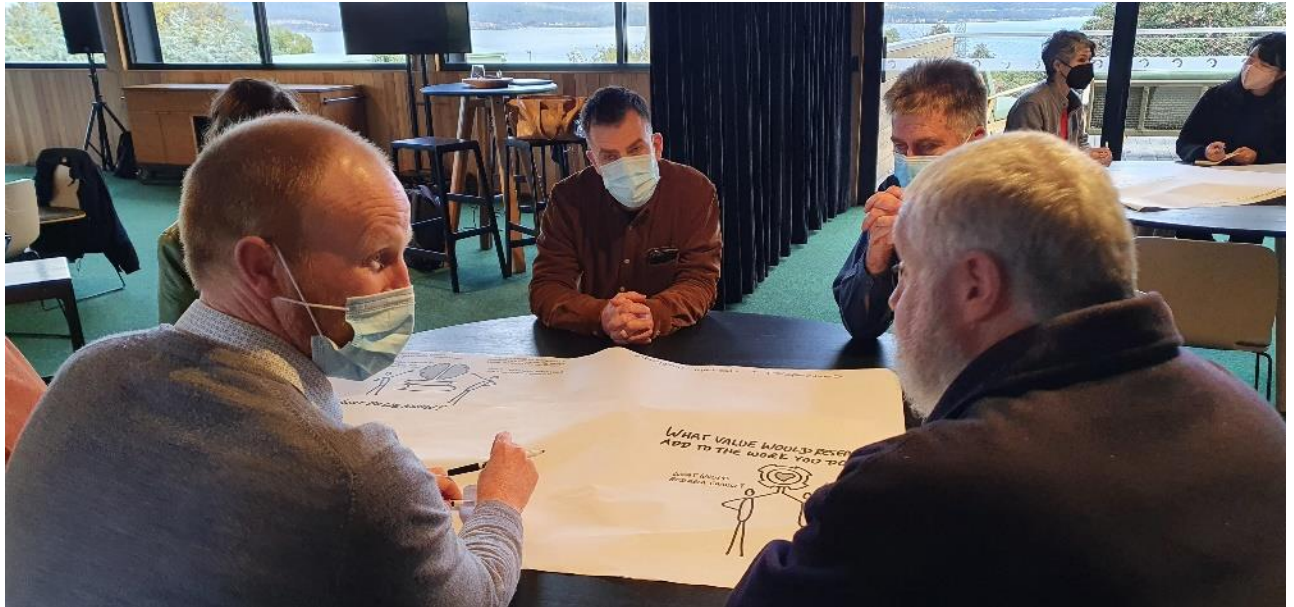
The discussion

Indigenous perspectives and interests

Amongst the participants in this group, there was a strong recognition of the importance of Indigenous voices for environmental management and sustainability. There was a genuine desire amongst the represented individuals and organisations to work with Tasmanian Aboriginal communities and people, and a reciprocal interest from the participating Tasmanian Aboriginal people to collaborate on matters of caring for and connecting with land and sea Country. Though there are diverse Aboriginal communities and perspectives across Tasmania, all care about Country, not just as a resource but as a deep and interconnected part of life.

However, there were some recognised challenges in engaging Aboriginal communities in environmental management and sustainability. Aboriginal engagement needs to be genuine, transparent, reciprocal and enduring and recognise the diversity of Aboriginal groups and perspectives in Tasmania. Engagement also needs to be respectful of Indigenous time and knowledge. Some Aboriginal people in Tasmania experience consultation fatigue: they are being asked to consult on many government and NGO policies and processes but often without recompense. Constantly changing policies and shifting goal posts make consultation demands high and some consultation ineffective. It was emphasised that consultation should be the process, not the outcome itself, and consultants should be compensated for their time and investment. Furthermore, Aboriginal people need to be not just consulted on decisions but empowered to make decisions. As one participant said: “how can we manage the land without the land?” There is also a need to build capacity in Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, especially for young people. There was interest in the

role that the Hub and other organisations like the Department of Education can play in engaging and equipping young people, especially in doing culturally relevant work.



Nature connection



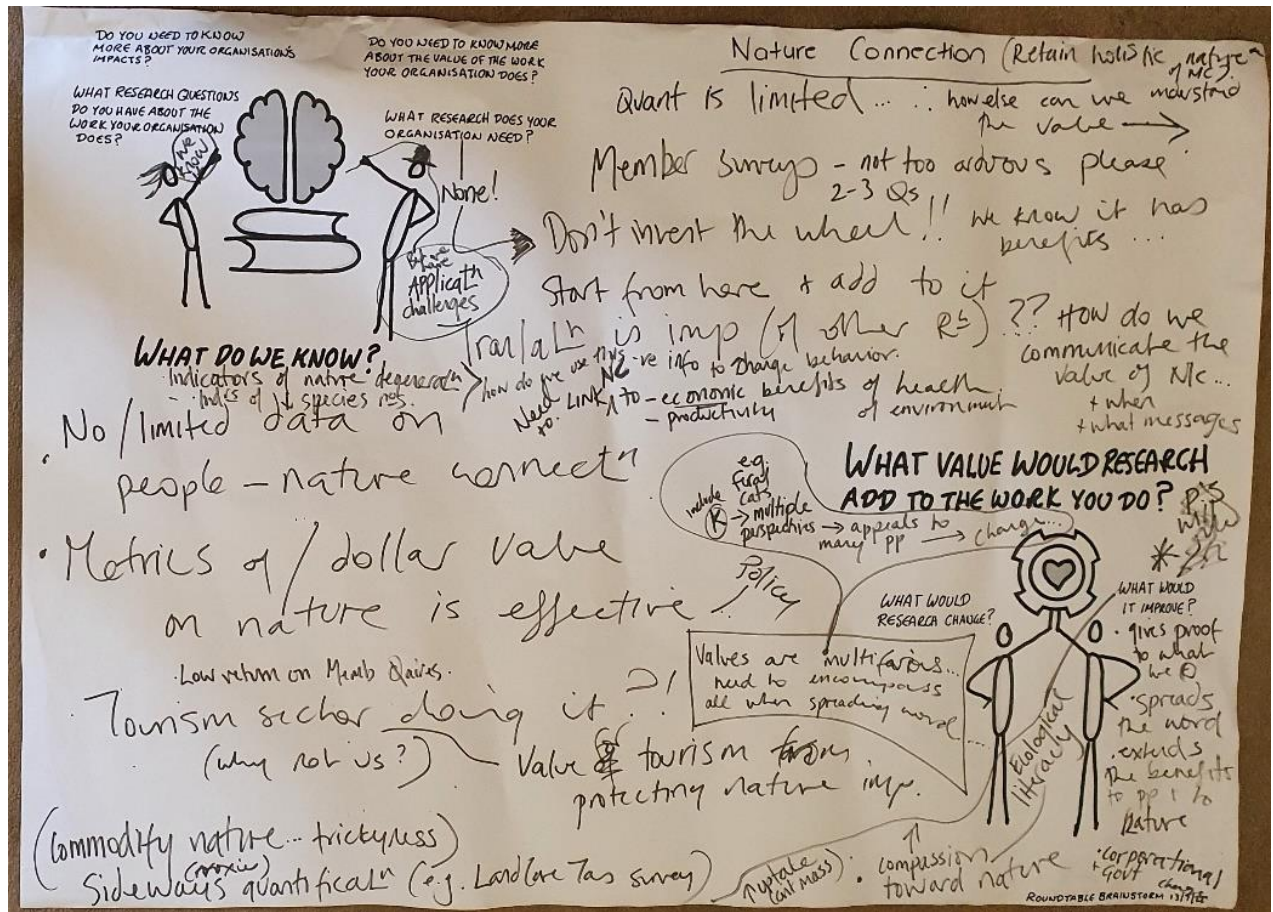
Unsurprisingly, amongst a gathering of ‘nature connectors’, there was a consistent and strong message throughout the day of the value of connecting people to nature.

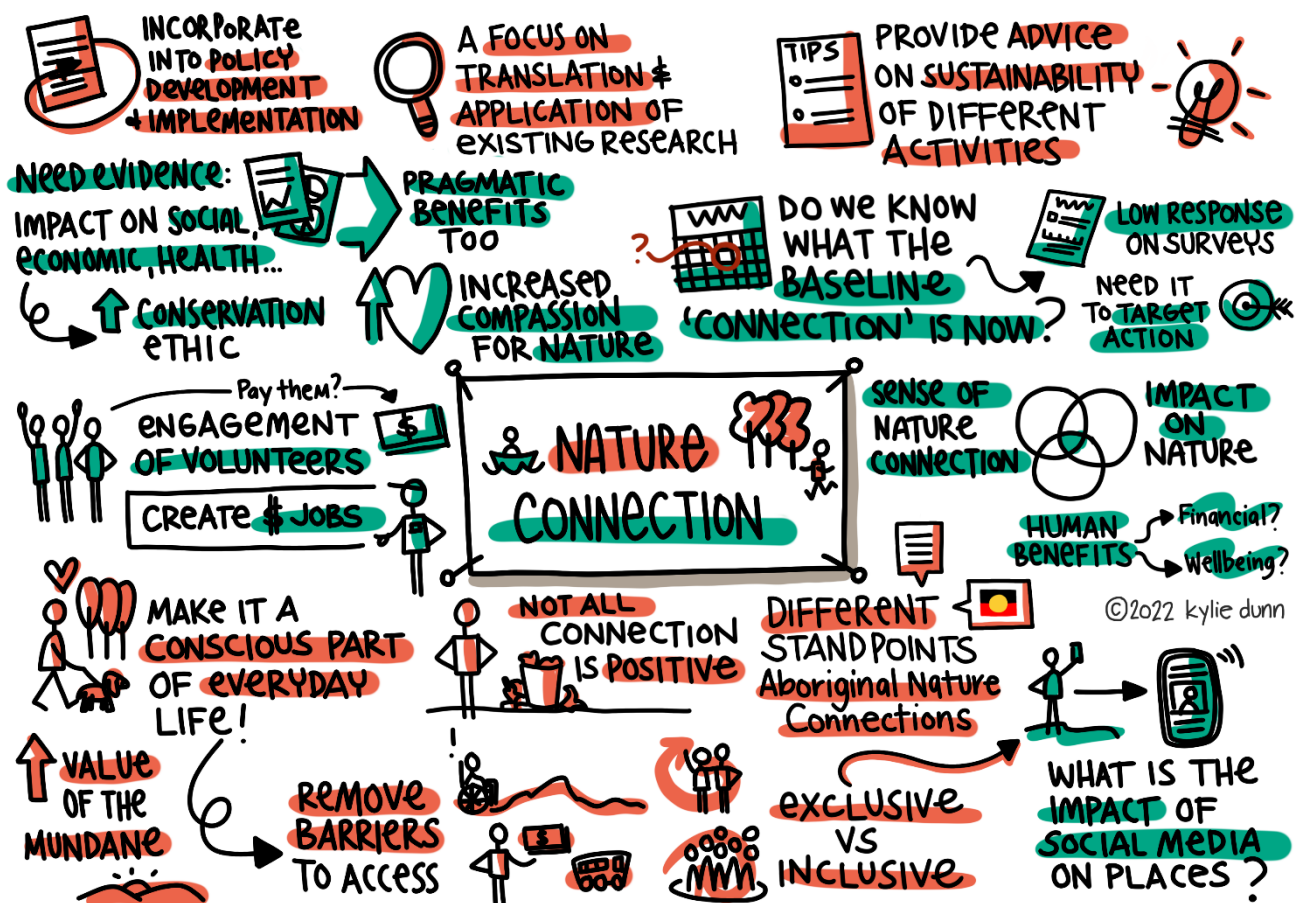
Participants provided much anecdotal evidence of the benefits they routinely saw amongst people in their various programs: health, wellbeing, employment, esteem, activity, social connection, and pro-environmental behaviours. People also shared the positive impacts on the environment, demonstrated in some cases over many years of activity by, primarily, volunteers.

Participants discussed research needs in terms of issues and problems that they were aware of. These included:

- Feeling sidelined by ‘mainstream’ funding sources (environmental and health)
- Feeling frustration about how to articulate the benefits to policy makers and funding bodies
- Feeling frustration that much research already exists, but is not acknowledged or appreciated
- Seeing indicators of nature degeneration and species extinction being gathered by various bodies but limited or no data on the impacts of people-nature connections, however. Not sure how to start with this
- Putting a dollar value on nature has been effective, but there have been issues created within tourism (over-tourism, over-development) that indicate the economic value does not always lead to environmental protection. Challenges with linking nature-connection to economic benefits and productivity measures
- Organisations rely heavily on surveys, with poor response rates and limited application
- Need to spread the word: ecological literacy needed!

- What is the best way to spread the message – what are the best messages to spread?
- Values are multifarious: need to be able to engage with a wide range of perspectives and values in order to generate community-wide action.





Urban greening

There was great discussion around the role of urban greening in creating more sustainable and liveable communities. Participants recognised the need for everyone (including people in cities) to have access to nature in order to connect with it. However, urban greening also involves important decisions around how to green; it should involve more than just planting trees, but creating diverse, resilient landscapes. We could do more to understand and communicate what urban nature looks like: it includes verges, private yards, public land, community gardens, veggie patches, street trees and more.

We could do more to embed greening and nature into urban planning and development by keeping vested interests at bay. Many community members are passionate about greening and take it upon themselves to increase the vegetation in our communities (e.g. guerrilla gardening); how can we support these passions and expand feelings of ecological responsibility? There was agreement that we need to better understand community perspectives on greening and how to effectively communicate about greening benefits and strategies so that community members and decision-makers can see the benefits of nature and the value of green infrastructure. Advances could be made through transdisciplinary

collaborations that involve government, industry, academia and private citizens that break down silos and educate and create enthusiasm for urban – and rural – greening initiatives.



Sustainability education

Sustainability education has been raised by partners of IP1 as a potentially important component of creating sustainable communities and sustainable people–environment interactions. It isn't something that has emerged strongly yet from our Departmental end-users so we are exploring if and how it might fit into IP1.

Something that came through strongly in the round table discussions was how sustainability education can be a facilitator of nature connection and have many co-benefits, including improved wellbeing for participants, and better outcomes for the environment. It was emphasised that sustainability education occurs both inside and outside the classroom (from family, workplaces and through play) and is a lifelong process that sometimes occurs under titles other than 'sustainability education'. To underline the relevance of the subject, some examples were shared of successful programs that leveraged off issues and challenges of the local community. A chicken-and-egg challenge was identified where education providers (e.g. TAFE) require there to be employment opportunities in a field before offering a program of study in field. However, employment opportunities can be created by trained individuals and can only be sustained when there is a sufficient workforce.



Proposed areas of research interest included:

- How to define and measure learning, and other changes (e.g. identity, values, attitudes, improved mental health, and pro-environmental behaviours) that occur through sustainability-focussed learning
- How to better integrate sustainability and nature-based concepts into the curriculum (since it is already part of the national curriculum)

- How to better communicate about sustainability and ensure communication and education efforts are reaching the people and populations needed (e.g. decision-makers)
- The role of technology in sustainability education and nature connection and how it can be used effectively to advance both.



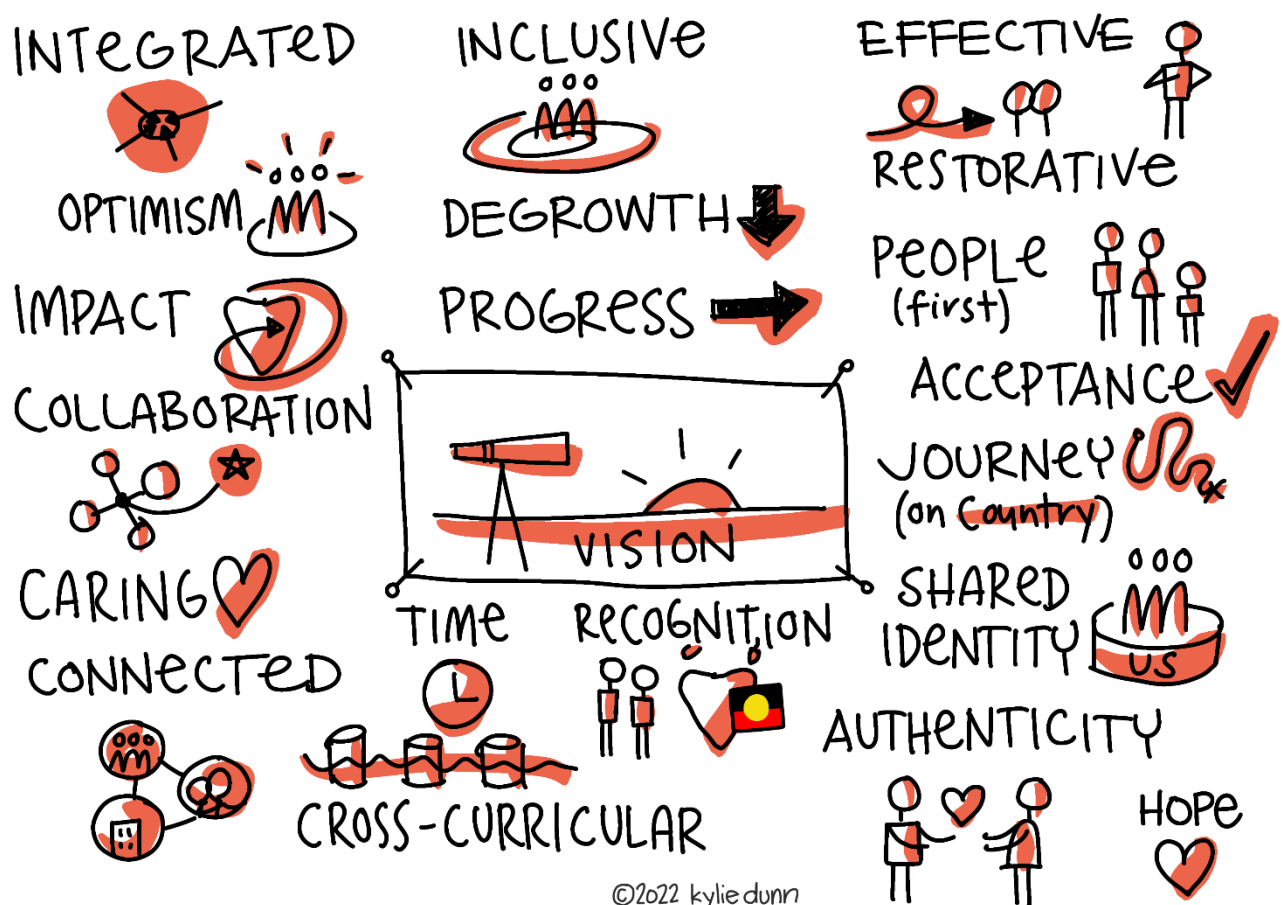
Next steps: What will a Nature Connection research agenda look like?

Following the workshop, we (the report authors!) sat down and digested the discussion material from the day. We found five strong drivers for a research agenda – five key issues that our research can address:

1. Equity – nature connection needs to be equitable and research should consider ways to address barriers to access and engagement that exist along socio-economic, cultural, and ability lines.

2. Lifecourse – across all ages, people connect to nature in various ways, in various places. Research should be designed to hear the voices of young, old and in between, and to improve nature connection for all age groups.
3. Multiple benefits – Nature connection has a raft of benefits for humans and the planet, and research needs to capture, qualify and quantify these. It needs to provide evidence of the benefits to health, wellbeing, the environment, the economy, education, work, cultural continuity and a meaningful life.
4. Localised – people are in the business of connecting to nature in their local area. Most of the workforce is local volunteers, raising issues of resourcing, sustainability and burn out. Local experiences provide the nuances of nature connection, and research needs to tap into these for a rich understanding.
5. Translational – There is a huge need to be able to communicate the benefits, needs, impacts and issues across all the stakeholders. The research needs to communicate the importance of nature and the benefits from nature connection, as well as assist partner organisations to communicate with governments, funders and communities.

Alongside these drivers, we considered participants' summary 'words' (below) from the final session of the day, our funder requirements and end-user needs, our resources and timelines. From all of this, we developed three key research questions and a broad plan of research.

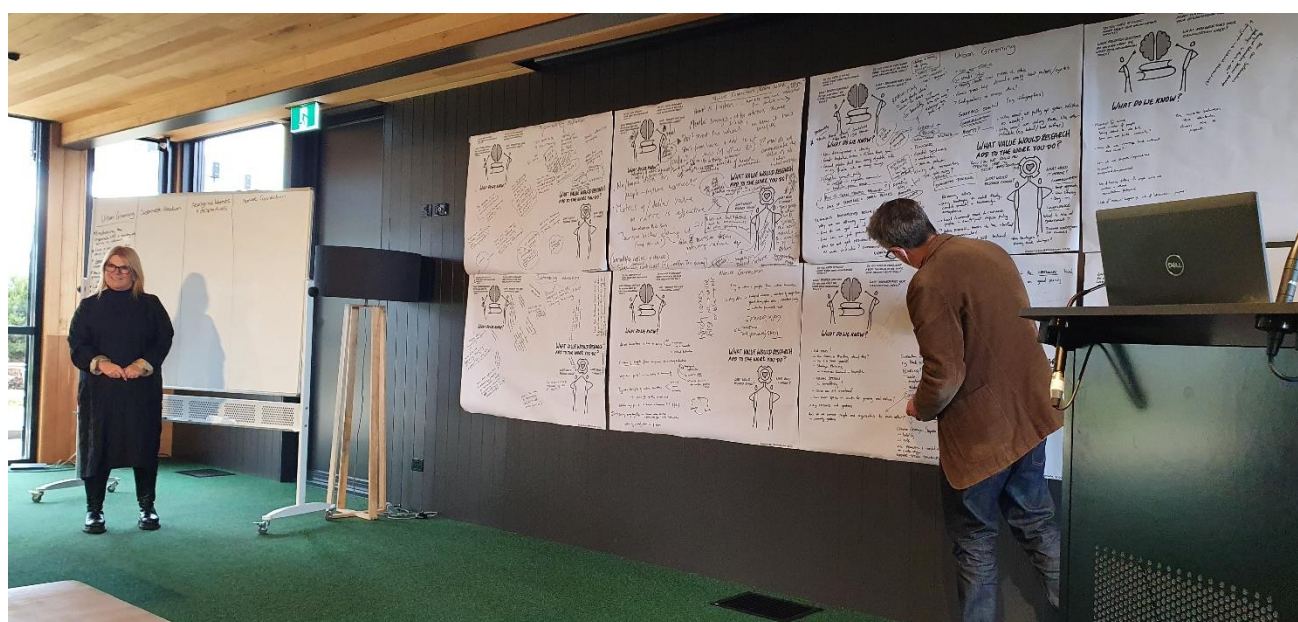


The Research Questions

Research Stream 1: What are the characteristics of nature connection across Australia and in what ways does connecting with nature increase or activate people's values for nature, motivate pro-environmental and sustainability behaviours and impact wellbeing?

Research Stream 2: How can new and existing strategies that enable nature connection (e.g. urban greening and Nature-based Solutions) be scaled up and out for greater shared environmental, community and national impacts?

Research Stream 3 (Indigenous-led): How can research and capacity building enable cultural connection, and support sovereignty and land and sea management/caring for Country by Australian Indigenous communities?



The Nature Connection Research Plan 2023–2027

1. Develop an interactive, national nature connection storymap (a repository of stories). Create an accessible platform for gathering and sharing stories of nature connection. Work with partners to gather stories in a range of forms (written, oral, visual) that collectively demonstrate the variety of experience, impacts and implications. From this body of creative work, we can characterise, map and communicate what nature means to us and document and articulate its value.
2. Conduct a national survey to understand nature connection and its benefits across Australia. This approach will allow us to better understand the diversity of ways people engage and connect with nature across the country. We can explore how those connections and perceived benefits vary across different types of environments (e.g. coastlines, urban parks, bushland). By tying nature-connection feelings and actions to wellbeing, we will have the potential to quantify nature's wellbeing benefits, which is an underexplored concept of interest to partners.

3. Work with Indigenous partners to develop an Indigenous-led project that can build capacity among Indigenous community members and support Indigenous empowerment and sovereignty around caring for and connecting with Country.

Acknowledgement

The Sustainable Communities and Waste Hub is funded by the Australian Government's National Environmental Science Program (NESP). 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, present and emerging. Our Indigenous research partners and partnerships are a valued and respected component of National Environmental Science Program research.
