

Consultation summary report



Churchill National Park and Lysterfield
Park Management Plan Amendment

May 2020



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Traditional Owner Acknowledgement

Victoria's network of parks and reserves, including Churchill National Park and Lysterfield Park, form the core of Aboriginal cultural landscapes, which have been modified over many thousands of years of occupation.

They are reflections of how Aboriginal people engaged with their world and experienced their surroundings and are the product of thousands of generations of economic activity, material culture and settlement patterns.

Parks Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of these cultural landscapes, recognising their continuing connection to Victoria's parks and reserves and ongoing role in caring for Country.

1. Introduction

Parks Victoria is amending the management plan for Churchill National Park and Lysterfield Park to reflect changes to the recreational use of these parks over the past twenty years. The scope of this amendment aims to recognise mountain biking as a significant recreational activity in the park, document existing trails and update management zones. Community consultation about the management plan amendments was undertaken in late 2019 and early 2020.

Park overview

Lysterfield Park and Churchill National Park (the park) are popular areas to explore and enjoy nature. They are managed as one park unit for conservation and recreation reasons. Together they conserve over 1668 hectares with a range of environments including a major open wetland and relatively undisturbed natural forest.

The park is an example of Parks Victoria’s Healthy Parks Healthy People approach, which encourages people to interact with nature for the benefits it brings personal health and wellbeing and promotes the need for healthy natural landscapes.

The park is one of Parks Victoria’s most visited parks across the state, with annual visitation growing from 200,000 visitors in 1998 to 1.2 million in 2019. Running, walking, mountain biking, and picnicking are now the top activities for visitors in the park. In 1998, the top activities in the park were picnicking, bushwalking, sailing, windsurfing and horse riding.

On weekends and summer afternoons, Lysterfield Park is very popular with carparks often exceeding capacity.



State Mountain Bike Course Lysterfield Park

The park provides habitats for over 200 recorded wildlife species including significant bird species, echidnas, Swamp Wallabies and a large population of Eastern Grey Kangaroos. The park is home to species listed as threatened and is recognised as a site of botanic significance, containing regionally important species not commonly found in either the Eastern Highlands or Gippsland.

The Boonwurrung/Bunurong and Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people have lived in this area now known as Churchill National Park and Lysterfield Park for many thousands of years. During this time they maintained complex societies with languages, kinship systems, laws and spiritualities. Land forms the basis of Aboriginal existence and identity which, along with water and natural resources were sustainably managed according to traditional laws and customs. Today, there are known registered Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites in the park, and we continue to rediscover cultural heritage values throughout the parks. All known Aboriginal Cultural Heritage sites, registered or not registered, must be protected under Victorian Government law.



Lake Circuit Trail at Lysterfield Park

Project overview

The most recent park management plan was written in 1998 (reviewed in 2009). This was before most of Lysterfield Park's mountain bike trails were built (in 2005-2006) and before mountain biking became a major activity in the park. The existing management plan does not formally refer to mountain biking as a key activity in the park. It also does not include contemporary management practices for Aboriginal cultural heritage. Amending the management plan will recognise the changes in use (particularly to mountain biking) and ensure contemporary management practices for Aboriginal cultural heritage are followed.

To gain feedback on proposed amendments to the park management plan, Parks Victoria engaged with community and stakeholders between 1 November 2019 and 26 January 2020.

Project Background

Mountain bike riders make up approximately a third of all visitors to the park and the park is in the top two busiest mountain bike destinations in Australia. The park's mountain bike trails and facilities are often busy and the trails are in a worn condition due to high use.

In recognition of the popularity of Lysterfield Park as a regional mountain biking destination, between 2018 and 2019 Parks Victoria undertook a detailed assessment of the park's mountain biking experience and environmental and cultural values to determine suitability for trail expansion. This assessment determined additional trails that could be built in the park subject to a relevant management plan amendment, funding and environmental and cultural impact approvals.

The management plan is being amended to support the mountain biking experience in the park while ensuring an appropriate balance between visitor access, other park uses such as

horse riding and walking, and environmental protection.

Project objectives

1. To amend the management plan to include the park's existing mountain bike trail network
2. To seek community input on the changing uses of the two parks and the proposed conservation and recreation zones
3. To determine public understanding of Aboriginal heritage values and ensure contemporary land management practises are reflected in the management plan

About this report

This report provides a summary of the consultation activities, participation and findings from community consultation between 11 November 2019 and 26 January 2020. It was prepared by Parks Victoria.

The feedback and ideas presented in this report were collected through consultation activities, email or online via Engage Victoria. All input has been considered equally. The findings in this report reflect the views of the participants involved in the consultation process and do not necessarily reflect the beliefs or position of Parks Victoria.

Parks Victoria is committed to considering all the feedback summarised in this report in the development of the plan. It is important to note that ideas suggested need to be considered in relation to relevant legislation that applies to the national park landscape and weighed up against other obligations and data.

Parks Victoria would like to thank the participants who generously shared their time and ideas throughout the engagement process.



The park is an important area for the Threatened South Toadlet

Report limitations

The following limitations in this report and consultation process that need to be acknowledged are:

- People who participated in the consultation process self-selected to take part. Therefore, the information in this report does not necessarily reflect the views of a representative sample of community.
- There was high representation of mountain bikers as engagement participants (who represent 35% of park users but were 83% of engagement participants). Not all visitor groups or demographics were represented equally in the engagement contributions.
- While background information was provided, it cannot be guaranteed that all participants read and understood this. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that all participants had an equal understanding of the project and the purpose of management plans.
- The Management Plan covering both parks was published in 1998 and evaluated in 2009. Only the areas relating to the project objectives are being amended, therefore consultation was only conducted on relevant park values and activities.
- Some participant quotes used in this report have been adjusted for spelling and grammar errors.
- Participants self-reported on their level of knowledge and awareness of the Traditional Owners and Aboriginal cultural values. All responses were taken in good-faith, though the interpretation of this question may have led to varied responses.

2. Consultation approach

Parks Victoria engaged with community and stakeholders between 11 November 2019 and 26 January 2020 to gain feedback on a series of proposed amendments to the park management plan. Over 600 people shared feedback and ideas on the amendments to the plan during this consultation period.

Purpose of consultation

The purpose of the consultation was to:

- Inform community and interested stakeholders of the amendment process for the Lysterfield and Churchill National Park management plan.
- Provide community and stakeholders with an opportunity to give feedback on the planned amendments.
- Hear from community and stakeholders about their views on safety and trail usage in the park.
- To build a stronger understanding of how different trail users find the current trail safety management.

Engagement tools and techniques

A variety of engagement tools and techniques were used to provide different opportunities for stakeholders and community to have their say.

The tools and techniques used were:

Website and survey

(11 November 2019 – 26 January 2020)

- There was a dedicated engagement web page hosted on Engage Victoria - <https://engage.vic.gov.au/churchill-national-park-and-lysterfield-park-management-plan-amendment>
- Over the engagement period, 2,508 people visited the project webpage.
- The project webpage provided information on the amendments and park background and encouraged contributions via an online survey.

- The online survey was completed by 600 people (244 pins were also added to a mapping activity seeking general feedback on the park).

Stakeholder meetings

(December 2019 and January 2020)

- Meetings were offered to key stakeholders and community groups to meet, discuss and provide feedback. Meetings and discussions were held with City of Casey, Yarra Ranges Council, Lysterfield District Trail Riders (LDTR) and Friends of Lysterfield Park.
- Submissions were emailed through by Yarra Ranges Shire Council, City of Casey Council and Friends of Lysterfield Park. Lysterfield District Trail Riders did not provide a submission, rather, the group encouraged participation via the online survey.

Drop in event at Lysterfield Park

(8 December 2019)

- A four-hour drop-in event was conducted at the main visitor areas of Lysterfield Park on Sunday 8 December 2019. Sundays are the busiest day of the week in the park and December is the second busiest month of the year.
- The drop-in event sought to engage people visiting the park and provide the opportunity for people to talk about the plan with Parks Victoria staff. Participants were invited to take

project information with them, or to have a discussion with staff and complete a survey.

- Approximately 25 people talked to Parks Victoria staff at the community drop-in.

Posters, social media promotion (during December and January 2020, Facebook post on 18 December)

- To help inform people about the process posters were displayed at all three toilet facilities within Lysterfield Park, at park entrances and in the middle of the park at key trail intersections on the mountain bike network.
- Parks Victoria promoted the engagement period on social media through Facebook.

Key stakeholders

Specific groups and stakeholders contacted included (but not limited to) the following:

- Bicycle Network Victoria
- Casey City Council
- Dandenong City Council
- Department of Sport and Recreation
- Field Naturalists
- Friends of Lysterfield Park
- Horse riders
- Knox Council
- Licenced Tour Operators
- Lysterfield District Trail Riders
- Lysterfield Sailing Club
- Montague Orchards
- Mountain Biking Australia
- Outdoors Victoria
- VNPA
- Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation
- Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- Boon Wurrung Foundation
- Yarra Ranges Council



Lysterfield Park is home to a large population of Eastern Grey Kangaroos

3. Who participated?

In the online survey hosted on Engage Victoria participants were asked a number of questions about their visitation to the park.

A significant majority of participants (83%) said they mountain bike in the park. Other key activities listed by participants were walking and running (see Figure 1).

Most people (55%) said they were weekly visitors to Lysterfield Park. A high portion (28%) visit monthly.

83 per cent said they travel more than 11 kilometres to get to Lysterfield Park (see Figure 3). This relatively long travel distance highlights the park’s regional¹ significance as a mountain biking destination for eastern and south eastern Melbourne.

Most participants said they spend two to three hours in the park and walk, run or ride 16-25 kilometres (see Figure 4). This data is consistent with local park management staff knowledge of visitor behaviours.

The representation of mountain biking in the survey results is higher than the actual percentage of mountain biking visitation in the park based on trail counter data and visitor count days. See Table 1 on the following page. The representation of horse riders in the survey was higher than actual horse rider use of the park but not to the scale of mountain biking.

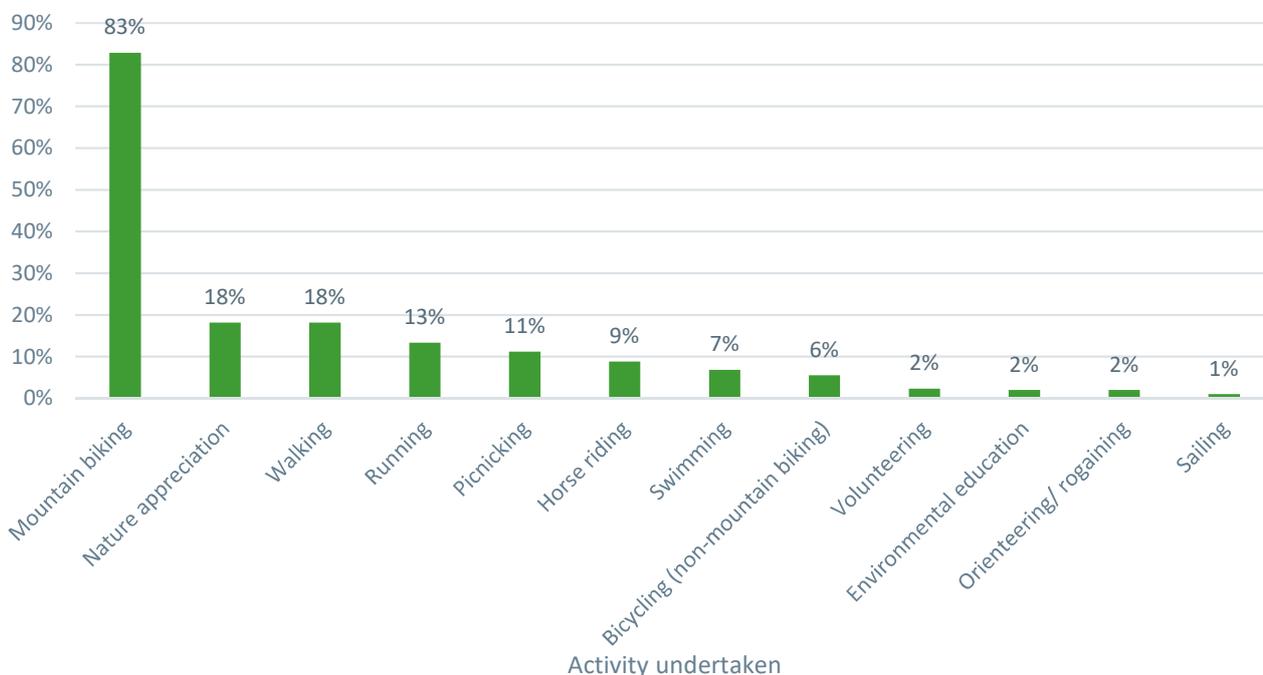


Figure 1 – Participants’ main activities undertaken when visiting the park (n=600). Note people could select more than one which is why total percentages equal more than 100.

¹ Regional Significance in mountain biking refers to networks that have between 20km and 80km of trail with 50% being single track.

Table 1: Survey participation in comparison to trail distance and visitation in the park

Activity Type	Survey participants	Percentage of dedicated trail distance in park	Parks Visitation (Source: vehicle and trail counters and annual visitor surveys)
Mountain biking	83%	22%	35%
Walking and Running	31%	5%	35%
Picnicking	11%	Not applicable	20%
Swimming	7%	Not applicable	5%
Horse Riding	9%	6%	1%

Distance travelled to the park

Participants predominantly travel between 11-30 kilometres to visit the park, however 20 per cent travel over 30 kilometres.

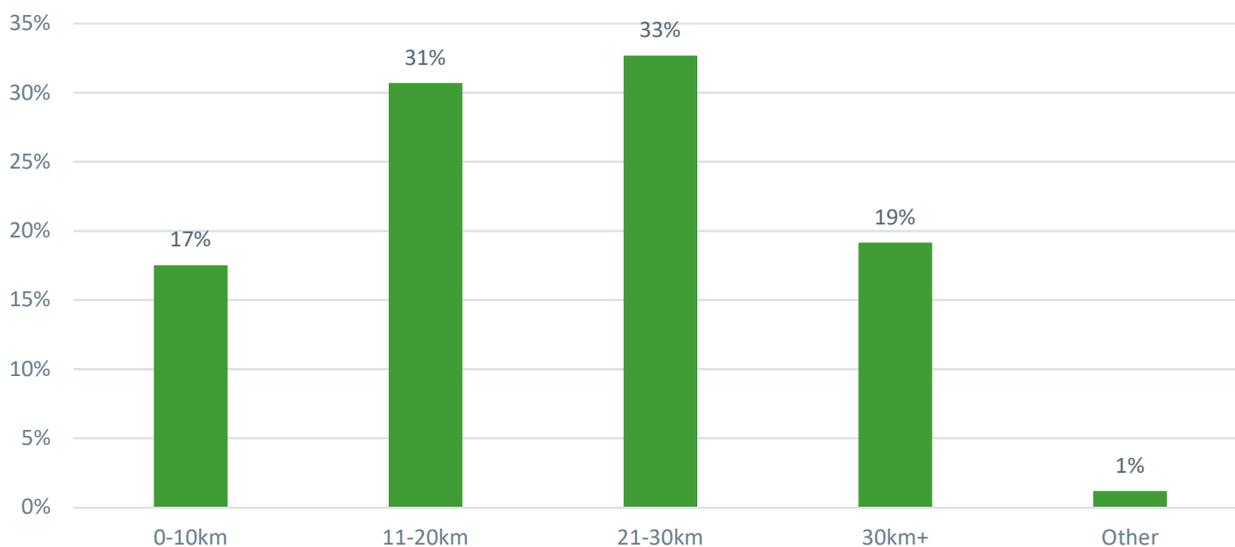


Figure 2: Distance travelled to visit the parks (n=618) note: some participants selected more than one answer

Behaviour at the park

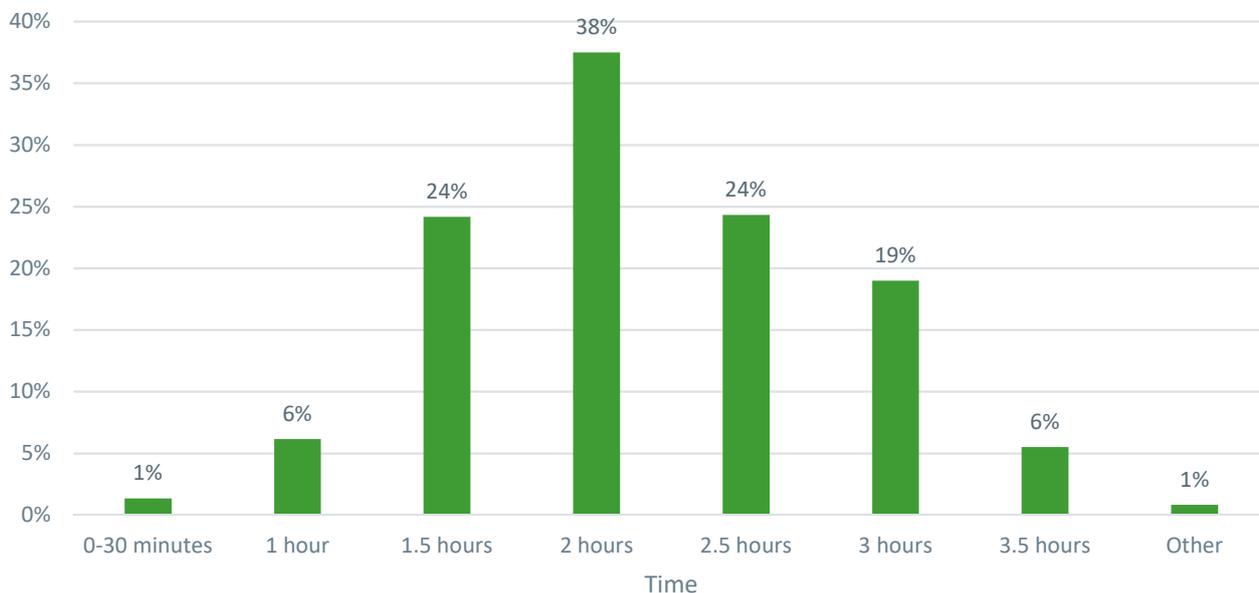


Figure 3: Time participants walk, run or ride in the parks (n=713) note: some participants selected more than one answer

Most participants spend two to three hours in the park and walk, run or ride between 16-25 kilometres.

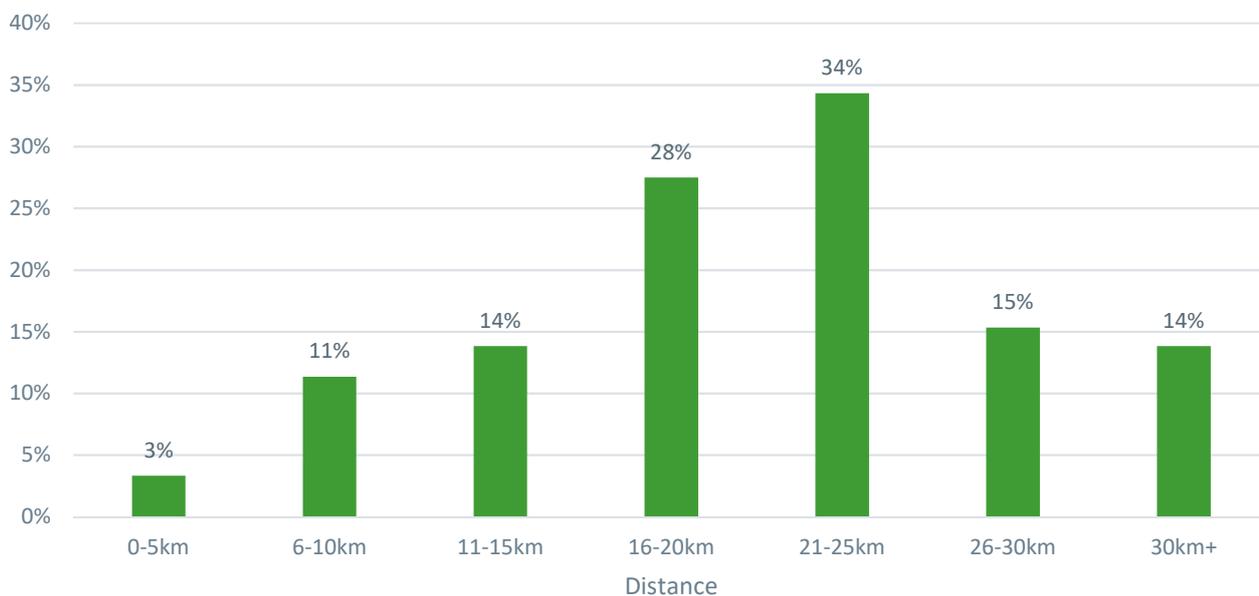


Figure 4: Distance participants walk, run or ride within the park (n=717) note: some participants selected more than one answer

4. Summary of findings

Trails used

The trails most frequently used by survey participants are shown in Table 2 below.

For mountain biking, the trails participants said they used most frequently are black grade trails. However, the most frequently used trails according to on ground trail counter data are Hug Trail, Dog Pound, Middle, Red Gum, Snipe, Lower

Buckle and Trailmix which are all blue/green grade trails.

A very small number (five) participants had visited the park with a tour company and this was predominantly for outdoor recreation through school or Scouts. Some people had also visited as part of events such as the Oxfam fundraising walk, mountain biking and orienteering events.

Table 2: The most used trails visited in order activity type, as reported by survey participants.

Walking and running	Mountain biking	Horse riding
1. Lake Circuit Trail	1. State MTB Course	1. East Boundary track
2. Granite Peak Trail	2. Aneurysm	2. Gun Club Track
3. Acacia Nature Trail	3. Follow Me	3. Logan track
4. Scealys Trail	4. Hug Trail (equal 4th)	4. Echidna track
	4. Buckle Trail (equal 4th)	5. Native Cherry Tree
	5. Blair Witch	<i>*Many participants did not know the names of the horseriding tracks they ride.</i>
	6. Humping Hound	

Shared trail management

In a park as busy as Lysterfield Park it is critical to understand and manage where and how different user groups interact to minimise conflict and provide safe and enjoyable experiences for all visitors. To develop a greater appreciation on how visitors are experiencing current trails, participants were asked the question:

‘There are many shared trail arrangements in the park between walkers, runners, cyclists, horse riders and management vehicles, do you have any ideas about how these shared trails can be managed better in the future?’

Most participants responded that they felt the management and current system of shared trails was good. Several participants commented that the 2019 introduction of a single direction policy for the mountain bike network has helped reduce conflict and has improved their experience.

“Recently introduced one direction trails is a great step forward in safety and general pleasantness (No one abusing another for not giving way)” – Survey respondent

“Personally, I have never had any negative interactions with runners, walkers, horse riders or management vehicles. Awareness and respect to other users goes a long way in this regard.” – Survey respondent

The most commonly listed idea to improve the current shared trail system is for more and better signage. Participants suggested additional signs at the start and intersections of trails with key information such as: who can use the trail (bikes, walkers, horses), and how to use it (direction, speed, behaviour around horses etc).

“There are a few places where additional signage is needed. Some of the trails have recently become one way which is much safer but we have seen several riders about the head onto some tracks the wrong way because there were

no signs at the junction they arrived at. Would also be good to have a few more signs indicating where trails are shared with walkers and where they are only for riding, to keep walkers and riders safer.” – Survey respondent



Signage upgrades and Single Direction Trails introduced in 2019 improved safety

Participants also suggested that more maintenance of trails would improve safety and visitor experience, in particular to reduce erosion and root exposure.

The most common conflict raised on shared trails was between horse riders and mountain biking. Many responses suggested that there could be more tracks where horses and mountain bikes are separated, particularly the wider trails (rather than allowing them on narrow trails). Some participants suggested education about how to behave near with other user groups.

Many mountain bikers commented that they avoided using shared trails because they were generally flatter and wider and not as enjoyable. For many riders, shared trails are only used to travel between dedicated mountain biking trails.

Many participants who currently participate in mountain biking would like to see more dedicated mountain biking trails.

Mountain bikers tended to respond that mountain bike trails should be for mountain bikes only but that all other trails could be shared. Likewise, there was a strong request from horse riders that the area east of Logan Park should only be used by horses due to the concern that horses and bicycles do not mix safely.

“Bikes and horse users should have designated areas of a more equal proportion” – Survey respondent



Riders and Runners share the wide Lake Circuit Trail

Management Zones

To obtain feedback on adjustments to management zones, participants were asked the question:

‘Do the proposed management zones and overlays find a balance between visitor experiences, cultural and environmental values and sensitivity, statewide infrastructure and fire and emergency commitments?’

Participants were primarily unsure whether the proposed zones struck a balance between visitor experiences, cultural and environmental values and sensitivities, statewide infrastructure and fire and emergency commitments. As Figure 5 illustrates, the most chosen response was Unsure (44%), followed by No (31%) and then Yes (26%).

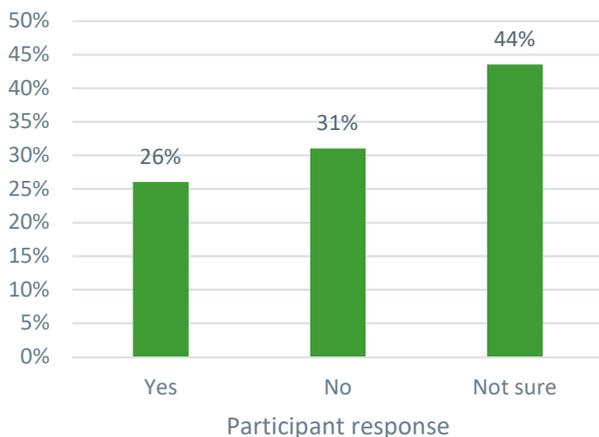


Figure 5: Participants response to the question about whether the proposed zones find a balance (n=600)

There were differences in opinion between different user groups. This included that:

- The highest percentage of **yes** responses were from **runners** followed by **walkers**
- The highest percentage of **no** responses were from **mountain bikers and bicycles (non-mountain bike)**
- The highest percentage of **not sure** responses were from **horse riders and picnickers**

Participants who responded No to whether the proposed zones find a balance were asked to explain why.

Unsure that proposed management zones find a balance

The most common reason why participants said they were unsure was because they did not fully understand the documents provided. They said they would like a better understanding about how the proposed zones would impact current activities in the park. Many participants who were not sure indicated that they would be happy with the balance provided it did not mean any changes/reduction to existing trails.

Disagreeing that the proposed management zones find a balance

Participants who thought the proposed zones do not find a balance were asked to explain why (156 participants gave details). The main reason given was because they believed the proposed zones did not allow for adequate expansion of mountain bike trails in the future. Some participants said expansion is necessary because of increasing visitor numbers and mountain bikers in the park.

“The zoning does not truly represent the value of the biodiversity in the park; fails to acknowledge that trails can be designed to avoid biological or culturally significant locations and built and maintained with limited disturbance; and does not reflect the high demand for mountain biking and new mountain bike trails in the Park.” – Survey respondent

Other common reasons that participants felt the proposed management does not find a balance were:

- One council commented that they do not believe the size and facilities of Lysterfield Park could effectively manage three significant and largely conflicting trail user

groups (runners and walkers, mountain bikes and horse riders). They questioned whether there needs to be consideration of adjusting any of those uses if there is a plan to expand another.

- Mountain bike participants agreed they would like to see more trail maintenance and more trails in the park.
- Many participants said while they acknowledge the importance of protecting environmental and cultural values, this needs to be balanced with the health and wellbeing values of recreation in Lysterfield Park.
- Some participants said they believed mountain biking on properly maintained trails would have no more impact on environmental values than other park users. They noted that other parks in Australia have shown that trails can be constructed to minimise impact on natural values using boardwalk, bridges and other techniques.
- There was concern that the new zoning would affect existing trails.

Local Council Input

Yarra Ranges Shire Council and The City of Casey Council both provided submissions. Both shared a position that Lysterfield Park is a regionally valuable area for their constituents for mountain biking, running and walking (and horse-riding, City of Casey) as the park provides a hilly bushland environment that is unique to this area of their municipalities. Accordingly, they expressed concern about a large expansion of special protection areas given the potential impact it would have on future recreational use.



A 2019 planned burn in Lysterfield Park's asset protection zone

Traditional Owner and Aboriginal cultural values knowledge

To determine participants understanding of Aboriginal heritage values participants were asked:

‘What is your level of knowledge and awareness of the Traditional Owners and Aboriginal cultural values of these parks?’

As illustrated in Figure 6, most participants said they were somewhat aware of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal cultural values in these parks. A third of participants also said they were not aware of values.

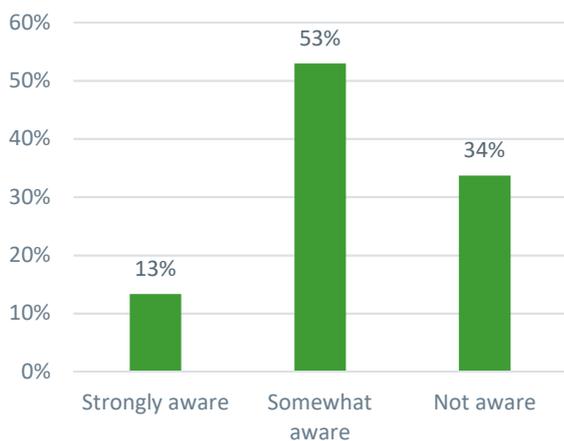


Figure 6: Participant responses to the question about their knowledge of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal cultural values in these parks (n=591).

Participants were asked to give ideas for how Parks Victoria could better support Traditional Owners and protect Aboriginal cultural values.

Participants' number one suggestion for recognising and protecting cultural heritage values was to provide education and information for visitors. They highlighted the importance of sharing the stories of the landscape, particularly Aboriginal stories, to build appreciation for these values. Suggestions included sharing stories

through educational tours, increasing interpretative signs, school programs, guidebook information and increasing the number of Traditional Owner rangers and tourism opportunities.

“I think better signage and information would help. I only know that there are Aboriginal heritage sites around, I have no idea what they look like or where they are or what they mean.”
– survey respondent

Some participants also felt there is a need to increase the information and education about where culturally significant sites are to avoid accidental harm. However, some acknowledged the challenges associated with sharing all Aboriginal culturally significant sites.

Some participants acknowledged that they have limited knowledge or would like to learn more about cultural values in the area.

Volunteering

To understand how volunteering can be improved participants were asked:

‘Do you have feedback or ideas about how Parks Victoria can better facilitate volunteer activities for the park?’

Altogether, 87 participants made suggestions to assist volunteering. Their key suggestions were to:

- Provide more support (such as education, tools and financial support) to existing recreation clubs to do more volunteering activities
- Communicate and work together with volunteer organisations so that efforts are strategic and mutually beneficial.
- Promote volunteering needs and opportunities more proactively through social media channels and signage in the park. Many participants said they were unaware that they could volunteer to help care for the park.

“Parks Victoria can continue to strengthen its connection with recognised clubs that use the park (mountain biking, running, orienteering, water sports etc) and promote more volunteer activities through these clubs.” - Survey participant



Lysterfield District Trail Riders Trail Build Day



Friends of Lysterfield Park – Mountain Biking Map Sign Install

5. Summary of other feedback

Some participants provided additional feedback that is out of scope of this management plan amendment. The key suggestions included:

- Build more mountain bike trails
- A trail maintenance regime in line with the significant trail usage
- More single track for runners/allow use of mountain bike trails
- Have a café or food offering in the Visitor Centre
- Provide a designated horse float parking area with clear signage that indicates that other users should not park there
- Provide more parking in Hallam North carpark to meet increasing demand
- Provide more toilets and improve the maintenance of existing toilets
- More compliance on illegal dog walking in the park.

6. Next steps

Alongside other research, the feedback captured in this consultation period will be used to inform the final management plan amendments.

This report is intended to reflect the views shared by community and stakeholders. Parks Victoria will review the feedback provided and use this information and mapped comments, alongside legislation to finalise the amendment to the management plan or supporting policy and implementation plans.



Swimming beach at Lysterfield Park

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Cover image
Lysterfield Park