

Victorian Great Forest National Park survey

Prepared for the Wilderness Society and Victorian National Parks Association

11 October 2024

Executive summary

Statewide polling found 84% of Victorians said national parks were important to them and 80% of Victorians support the creation of new national parks—while only 8% oppose them.

Most Victorians engage with their state's bushland, and say that the presence of a national park makes them more inclined to visit regional Victoria. 69% report having engaged in at least one activity in the bush in the past year.

Voters are more likely to say that delivery of the Great Forest National Park increases their support for Labor (33%) than reduces it (13%). Alternatively, failure to deliver appears to reduce this support (34%) more than increase it (10%).

Coalition support also benefits from backing new national parks and a logging ban, with 34% of voters reporting this increases their likelihood of voting for the Liberal and National parties, while it decreases the chances for 10%. Opposing new parks and a logging ban potentially loses these parties support, with 48% saying it would make them less likely to vote for the Coalition and 14% that it would make them more likely to do so. This pattern is observable with current Coalition voters and those living in inner and middle metropolitan areas, the outer suburbs, and rural and regional areas.

National parks matter to Victorians.

- 84% of Victorians claim that national parks were important to them (38% say very important and 46% somewhat important). Just 16% say they are not particularly or not at all important.
- This is a bipartisan view. 82% of Labor voters, 83% of Coalition supporters and 85% of Greens voters say national parks are important.
- It is also consistent across all parts of the state. 84% of Victorians living in the inner and middle suburbs of Melbourne rate national parks as very or somewhat important, as do 82% of those in the outer suburbs and 87% of those in rural and regional areas.*

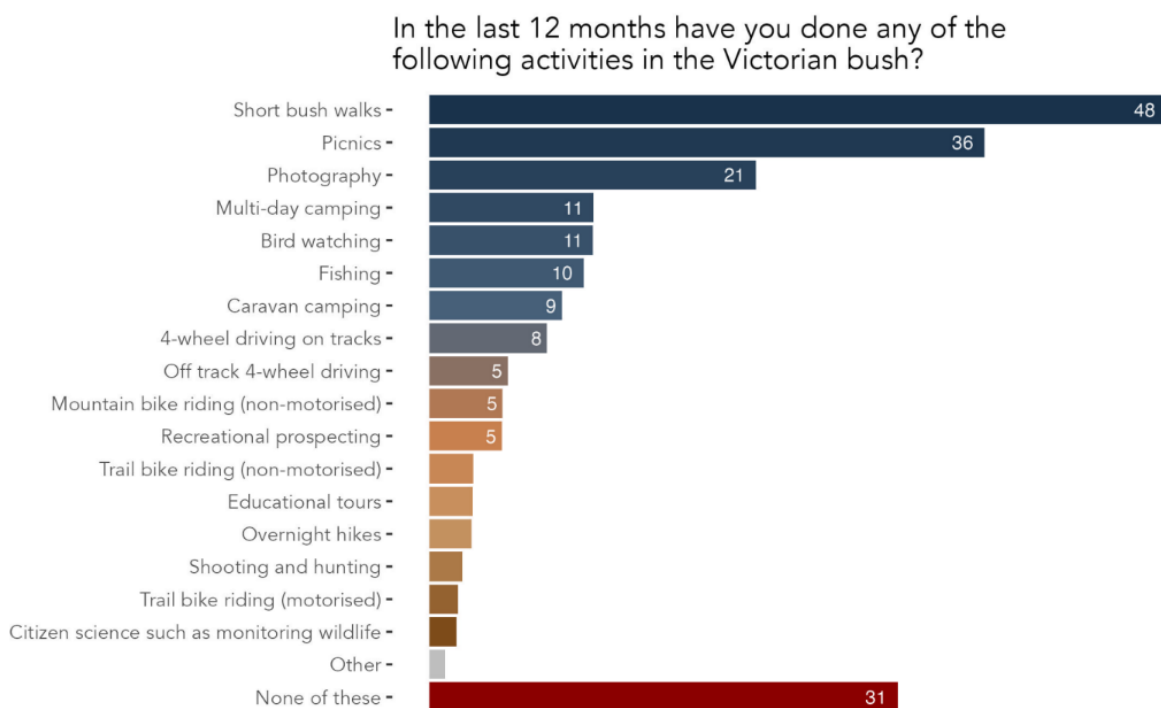
Support for new national parks is high

- **80% of Victorians support the creation of new national parks**, while just 8% oppose them. (36% strongly support and 44% support).
- Victorians' support for national parks is largely bipartisan and evenly distributed across the state whether inner city, middle ring or rural and regional areas.
- 89% of Labor voters, 72% of Coalition supporters and 94% of Greens voters support the creation of new national parks. The establishment of new parks are supported by wide majorities in the inner and middle suburbs of Melbourne (81%), the outer suburbs (82%) and rural and regional areas (79%).
- Support is particularly high among young Victorians with 85% of 18-34s supporting the creation of new national parks.
- Voters are more likely to say that delivery of the Great Forest National Park increases their support for Labor (33%) than reduces it (13%). Alternatively, failure to deliver appears to reduce this support (34%) more than increase it (10%).
- Coalition support also benefits from backing new national parks and a logging ban, with 34% of voters reporting this increases their likelihood of voting for the Liberal and National parties, while it decreases the chances for 10%. Opposing new parks and a logging ban potentially loses these parties support, with 48% saying it would make them less likely to vote for the Coalition and 14% that it would make them more likely to do so. This pattern is observable with current Coalition voters and those living in inner and middle metropolitan areas, the outer suburbs, and rural and regional areas.

Most Victorians engage with their state's bushland, and say that the presence of a national park makes them more inclined to visit regional Victoria.

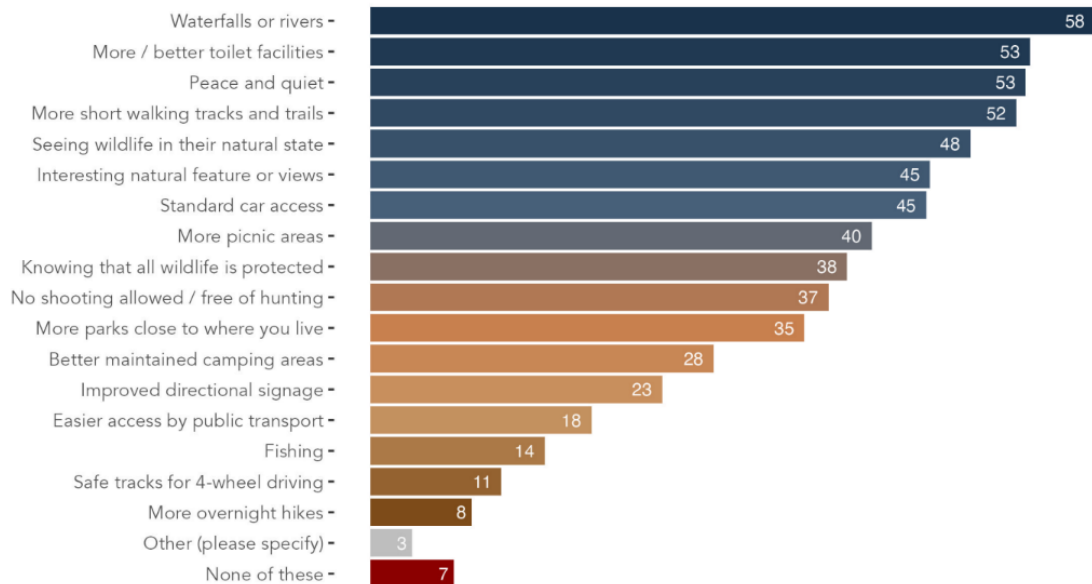
- More than half of Victorians (57%) say that the presence of a national park makes them more likely to travel to and stay in different parts of regional Victoria. Just five per cent say it makes them less likely to do so.
- 68% of younger Victorians aged 18-34 say that the presence of a national park makes them more likely to travel to a region.
- Labor (64%) and Greens voters (73%) were most likely to say that they were more likely to visit a region due to the presence of a national park compared with one in two Coalition voters. Responses were evenly distributed across the state.
- 69% of Victorians report having engaged in at least one activity in the bush in the past year.

- It is mostly those who rate the state's national parks as important who are more likely to be actively involved in the bush. 45% of Victorians who rate national parks as very important have engaged in three or more activities in the bush (with a median of two activities).
- The most common activities are short bush walks, of which almost half of Victorians (48%) report having participated in over the past year, followed by picnics (36%), photography (21%), camping over multiple days and birdwatching (11% each), and fishing (10%).



- Victorians were also asked to select which features or facilities would encourage them to visit national parks more often. More than half of respondents nominated either waterfalls or rivers (58%), more/better toilet facilities (53%), 'peace and quiet' (53%) and more short walking tracks and trails (52%) .

Which of the following would make you visit national parks more often?



The potential impact of national parks policy on support for the Labor Party

Victorians generally view national parks very favourably. Most have actively engaged with the bush in the past year, most say they are more likely to visit a regional area if it has a national park, and they strongly support the establishment of new national parks.

Therefore, it is no surprise that voters say they are more likely to vote for the Labor Party and Liberal-National Coalition if they establish (for the Labor government) or support (for the Coalition) new national parks in Victoria.

To test this, voters were exposed to two survey experiments.

- In the first, respondents were told that the Victorian state Labor government promised the “largest expansion to our forest reserve system in our state’s history” with one proposal to protect more of Victoria’s environment being the creation of a Great Forest National Park. Half the sample was then asked if the delivery of the new national park would make them more or less likely to vote Labor, while the other half of the sample was asked how failure to deliver would influence their vote.
- **Voters say they would be more likely to support Labor if they deliver the great Great Forest National Park than if they do not.** 33% of those who were asked if they were more or less likely to support Labor if they did deliver this new national park (N = 747). Just 13% said they would be less likely to vote Labor.

- Conversely, of those who were asked if failure to deliver would influence their vote (N=771), 10% said this would make them more likely to support Labor versus 34% who said it would make them less likely to do so.
- Focusing just on those who currently intend to give Labor their first preference vote, the impact is even more apparent. 55% of current Labor supporters say delivery of the park strengthens their resolve to vote Labor, and it makes just four per cent less likely to do so. Alternatively, failure to deliver the Great Forest National Park makes 21% of Victorians who currently intend to vote for the Labor Party less likely to do so, and 15% more likely.

Voters also say they are more likely to vote for a Coalition that supports new national parks and a ban on logging

Similarly, support for new national parks and a ban on logging in native forests is a net positive for the Coalition.

Half of the sample each were asked whether it would make them more or less likely to vote for the Liberal or National Party (depending on their electorate) if these parties either promised to oppose new national parks and allow logging to restart in native forests, or support new national parks and ban logging in these areas.

- 34% of those who were asked if they were more or less likely to vote for the Coalition if they supported new parks and a ban on logging (N = 763) said they would be. Ten per cent said they would be less likely to do so.
- Of those who were asked if opposition to new parks and a ban on logging would influence their vote (N=755), 14% said this would make them more likely to support the Coalition parties. 48% said it would make them less likely to vote for the Liberal and National parties.
- Even among current Coalition voters, support for national parks and a native forest logging ban is a net vote winner (figure 12). 36% of current Coalition voters say Liberal-National support for this strengthens their resolve to vote for these parties, and 10% say it makes them less likely to do so. Alternatively, opposition to new national parks and a logging ban makes 27% of current Coalition voters less likely to do give these parties their first preference, and 15% say it makes them more likely to do so.
- Support for national parks is a net positive for the Coalition parties across the inner and middle suburbs of Melbourne, the outer suburbs and rural and regional areas (see figure 14). 49% of voters in the inner and middle suburbs say that failure to support national parks and a logging ban would make them less likely to vote for the Coalition (in practice, these are all votes for the Liberal Party), while 9% say it would make them more likely to support the Coalition. Conversely, 37% of voters in these

inner and middle suburban areas say support for national parks and a logging ban would make them more likely to vote for the Coalition, while 9% say it would make them less likely to do so.

Victorians have a strong connection to Nature

- **86% of Victorians say that it is important for them and their family to be able to enjoy and connect with nature.** This sentiment is largely bipartisan (86% of Labor voters, 85% of Coalition supporters and 92% of Greens voters say enjoying and connecting with nature is important).
- Connection to nature is strong across all areas of Victoria but highest among Rural and Regional Victorians at 90%. It is also high among all age groups.

Methodology

The fieldwork for this survey was conducted between Thursday 26 September and Friday 4 October, 2024.

The sample of N = 1,518 Victorian citizens aged 18 and older, and who are enrolled to vote, was recruited via an online panel. Quotas for age, gender, location, education and vote at the 2022 federal election were used to ensure the sample is representative of the Victorian state electorate.

Rim weighting was used to apply interlocking weights for age, gender, education and location. The efficiency of these weights was 93 per cent, providing an effective sample size of 1412.

Based on this effective sample size, the margin of error (95 per cent confidence interval) for a 50 per cent result on the full sample is ± 2.6 per cent.

* Definitions: Inner urban is 10km radius of the CBD, then outer suburbs are the remainder. Rural and regional, outside the Greater Melbourne region.