

The Tasmania Project

Share your experience during COVID-19.



Photo: Tourism Tasmania and Chris Crerar.

National parks and access to nature: Priorities and values about Tasmania's 'green spaces'

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The Tasmania Project has found that during the pandemic, respondents strongly supported lifting restrictions that limited their access to natural environments.

Key findings

- Respondents indicated strong support for lifting restrictions related to outdoor activities.
- While most people understood why the restrictions were there, 28% of respondents did not.
- 58% of respondents indicated that access to 'nature' was a top priority for what they want for the future.
- Environmental issues, including environmental leadership, preservation of landscape and biodiversity, and climate action were frequently mentioned in relation to desires for the State's future.

Restrictions on national parks and reserves

From late March 2020, access to national parks and reserves in Tasmania was restricted completely, with restrictions remaining in place over the Easter long weekend in April. From 11 May 2020, these restrictions were lifted to allow Tasmanians to access national parks and reserves within 30km of their homes.

Restrictions on accessing 'green spaces' were lifted from 5 June, allowing Tasmanians to visit national parks across the state with the exception of some major sites such as the Overland Track and Ben Lomond National Park which opened on 15 June. Restrictions have also been lifted on recreational boating and camping. The responses summarised in this report were received during this first stage of restrictions when access to national parks and reserves was prohibited.

Lifting restrictions

Respondents voiced strong support for the reopening of national parks and beaches. When asked about what restrictions they wanted lifted first, the most common response was the restriction on visiting national parks, reserves and beaches (69%), with males aged 25-44 years more likely to choose this response (75%) alongside respondents from the South (72%), compared with those from the North (67%) and the North-West and West (62%).



Photo: Laura Purcell

Visiting shacks was also a common response, selected by just under one third of the sample (29%). Younger age groups (41% of 18-44 years compared with 26% of 44 years and above), couples with children (33%) and other household types (32%) were the most likely to select this response.

Similarly, boat ramps and recreational fishing (28%) was a popular response amongst younger age groups (33% of 24-44 years compared with 24% of 65 years and above) and parents with children (36%). For respondents from the North-West and West, this figure sat at 31% compared with those from the North (26%) and the South (28%).

Participants were asked if they agreed with the statement, 'I understand why national parks were closed'. Most respondents agreed that they understood (59%), although females aged 25-44 years (67%) were more understanding than males overall (48%). 28% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement and 13% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Confusion about the closure of national parks was also expressed by several interviewees. One participant explained that part of the appeal of moving to Tasmania was the opportunity to explore national parks, and that he wanted restrictions on national parks to be amongst the first lifted. Another participant expressed concern about the impact of the pandemic on Tasmania's tourism sector and suggested closing national parks was a mistake ("what's wrong with having a walk in a forest?").

It is interesting to note that although the largest proportion of survey respondents identified as having no party affiliation (25%), nearly a quarter identified as voting for the Greens (23%), followed by the Labor Party (17%), the Liberal Party (13%) and other (4%).

The future

Respondents were asked what they wanted most for Tasmania's future. Access to nature rated highly (58%) and was the 3rd most popular choice (of 16 options), with only 'affordable housing' and 'access to quality healthcare' chosen by more people.

Access to nature was more likely to be selected by males (59%), younger age groups (65% of 18-44 years compared to 56% of 44 years and above) and parents with children (63%). Respondents from the South (63%) also prioritised this higher than those from the North (50%) and North-West and West (49%).

When asked what they most wanted for Tasmania's future, 78 respondents (7%) chose to provide a 'free text' response. Of these, nearly half (33 respondents) referred to environmental issues such as environmental leadership, protection of biodiversity and preservation of Tasmanian landscapes, including national parks (18 respondents) and climate change leadership and action (15 respondents). Several respondents also referred to 'sustainability' (relating to industry, economy, and/or living practices).

Examples of responses regarding environmental issues such as biodiversity and preservation of national parks are below.

“What do you want most for Tasmania's future?”

- “[To] transition away from obsolete [sic] industries like forestry and mining”
- “[To] look after our national parks and open spaces and threatened species”
- “To keep our natural areas unspoiled by inappropriate commercial development”
- “Ending environmental destruction, preserving biodiversity”
- “Greater concern to protect its unique environment”
- “Stop native forest logging ... Concentrate on our breathtaking beauty and our uniqueness”

Where next?

This data provides insight into Tasmanian responses to restrictions limiting access to natural environments at the height of social distancing measures. It also reveals the complex ways that Tasmanians' connection with the State's 'green spaces' has been contextualised by the pandemic. It is clear that Tasmanians value their 'island lifestyle' and the data helps to highlight what should be prioritised to maintain the uniqueness of the State into the future.

Previous research suggests that Tasmanians have a strong sense of place, and deeply value their unique geography and access to natural environments. The social distancing restrictions that have been in place provide a unique opportunity to examine what Tasmanians value about spaces such as national parks and beaches, and how community life is shaped by access to these places.