



Position Statement on Funding and Protection of Natural Assets

Bushwalking Australia calls on the federal and state governments to urgently prioritise investment in the protection, maintenance and enhancement of our national parks, conservation areas and walking tracks.

Current funding levels are insufficient to maintain vital infrastructure, protect natural landscapes, and support increasing visitor numbers. We urge governments to commit to sustained, long-term funding that reflects the value of nature-based recreation to public health, tourism, and conservation.

The Importance of Well-Maintained Natural Areas

Access to protected natural areas is essential for:

- **Public health and wellbeing** – Time spent in nature improves physical and mental health, reducing healthcare costs. Many enjoy nature with others, fostering supportive relationships and reducing loneliness.
- **Tourism and local economies** – Well-maintained tracks attract visitors and locals, support businesses and strengthen regional economies.
- **Conservation and sustainability** – Responsible land management protects biodiversity and enhances climate resilience.
- **Respecting indigenous cultural heritage** - We support collaboration with traditional owners to respect cultural heritage and values while ensuring responsible recreational access

Growing Demand for Bushwalking and Outdoor Recreation

Bushwalking is the third most popular physical activity in Australia, with over 3.7 million participants (AusPlay data 2023-24). To meet the needs of increasing visitor numbers while protecting our natural areas, governments must:

- **maintain and expand existing tracks** to accommodate rising participation, including bushwalkers, trail runners, mountain bikers and other low-impact recreational users
- **plan for sustainable growth** by ensuring infrastructure aligns with environmental protection
- **provide essential amenities** such as toilets and shelters to reduce environmental impact and improve visitor experience

Concerns About High-Impact Tourism Infrastructure

Bushwalking Australia supports sustainable tourism investment that enhances, rather than detracts from, the natural environment. Poorly planned developments risk:

- **Disrupting the natural experience** – Commercial activities that erode the peace and quiet of national parks undermine their unique value.

- **Privatising public assets** – Luxury lodges, glamping resorts and artificial attractions like ziplines restrict access to only the wealthiest visitors while handing public land to private operators.
- **Limiting affordable access** – Replacing low-cost hiker camping with exclusive accommodation reduces accessibility for independent bushwalkers
- **Environmental damage** – Poorly designed developments harm biodiversity, destroy habitats and degrade fragile ecosystems.
- **Restricting self-guided bushwalking opportunities** – Some tourism models prioritise guided, commercial experiences over independent bushwalking, diminishing public access to tracks.

While tourism supports local economies, it must be balanced with long-term protection of the landscapes that attract visitors in the first place.

Federal and State Governments Should Prioritise:

- **Long-term, sustainable funding models** that ensure national parks and natural areas are not left reliant on commercialisation to remain accessible
- **Eco-friendly tourism infrastructure outside national parks** to reduce environmental impact.
- **Investment in track maintenance, signage and infrastructure** to improve accessibility and safety and **low-impact nature-based tourism initiatives** such as guided walks and ranger programs,
- **Preservation of self-guided, affordable bushwalking opportunities** for all users.
- **Support for volunteer-led track maintenance and conservation programs** through dedicated grants and resources
- **Genuine consultation with users, traditional owners and community groups** before considering development proposals.

About Bushwalking Australia

Bushwalking Australia Inc is the national body representing bushwalkers and recreational walkers. We support the bushwalking community, facilitate national collaboration and advocacy, and promote safe and environmentally responsible bushwalking.

Learn more: <https://bushwalkingaustralia.org>

Source: [Clearinghouse for Sport - Ausplay Data 2023-24](#)

Bushwalking NSW



BUSHWALKING
TASMANIA



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we walk and meet and their connection to land.