



STRATHBOGIE RANGES
IMMEDIATE PROTECTION AREA
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

April – May 2022



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

MosaicLab and the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement would like to acknowledge the Taungurung people, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we met.

We acknowledge and respect their continuing connection to the land, water, culture and the contribution they make to the life of our community.

We pay respect to their past and present Elders and their emerging leaders, and extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Eminent Panel for Community Engagement was appointed to independently assess and make recommendations on the future uses of the Immediate Protection Areas in the eastern part of Victoria.

As part of Phase 1, the Panel conducted a community engagement process on the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North Immediate Protection Areas throughout April – May 2022. This report, prepared by MosaicLab, a facilitation and engagement consultancy, captures the key findings from the engagement for the Strathbogie Ranges.

THE APPROACH



21
TARGETED
CONVERSATIONS



25
DROP IN
PARTICIPANTS

ENGAGE VICTORIA



8860
total page
views



2990
unique
visitors



716
responses



24%
response
rate



58
responses
to the
Strathbogie
Ranges map



421
responses
to the
Strathbogie
Ranges
feedback
form

**TOTAL
HOURS**



23 hours of conversations

The key themes to come out of the engagement included:

PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION – 23% OF THE COMMENTS



The protection and conservation theme for the Strathbogie Ranges was important across all forms of engagement. Preserving this forest and waterways for the future generations and to protect the ecology and biodiversity in the area for native species were what people felt contributed to a healthy forest. There was a strong connection between this theme and the support for and learning from Traditional Owners to manage Country and the opportunity to experience, connect and enjoy the forest.

RECREATION AND LOCAL USE – 16% OF THE COMMENTS



The Strathbogie Ranges currently provides for a number of recreational and leisure uses for local and wider communities. This theme brought together a range of divergent views including support for recreational activities for all to enjoy, specialist single use tracks for motorised sports and the opportunity for quiet leisure based activities such as bushwalking and running. There are some people that feel that some of these activities are destructive and should be removed, whilst others fear that they will have no place to partake in their activity of choice.

INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE – 13% OF THE COMMENTS



There is still confusion about timber harvesting in the Immediate Protection Area and there are still community members calling for the timber industry to cease. There is greater empathy for the timber industry and impact on the local economy and job opportunities and there is also a call to transition roles into preserving and protecting the forest and to support regeneration. Environmental and cultural tourism were seen as opportunities and the continuation of apiary as a way of supporting the biodiversity of the region and local farm crops.

LAND AND FOREST MANAGEMENT – 12% OF THE COMMENTS



Current land and forest management stretches across state and local government organisations. There is interest in the levels of management of the Strathbogie Ranges and the opportunities going forward. People who participated also responded to the quality of roads to support good access into the site and facilities to support better enjoyment of the area. Fire management and planned burns captured divergent views, from the need to protect local townships and manage fire risks through to a planned burn program that is considered destroys critical habitats and ecological values. There is interest and support to work closely with Taungurung on a cultural burns program.

TRADITIONAL OWNER INTERESTS AND SUPPORT – 7% OF THE COMMENTS



Traditional Owner interests and support was included in all key engagement activities and talked to the communities' support for Taungurung to take a stronger role in managing Country. There was interest in history and knowledge and it was seen as an opportunity for land managers, community and the Traditional Owners to work together. From some of the organisations the Panel heard from, there is a willingness to be guided by the Traditional Owners and to focus on healing the land, forest and waterways.

EXPERIENCE, CONNECTION AND ENJOYMENT FOR ALL – 7% OF THE COMMENTS



There is great acknowledgement from those that participated that the Strathbogie Ranges is a special place to experience and connect with the natural environment and to enjoy the surroundings. Enjoyment for all and for the activities to be balanced so as not to harm the forest

LOCAL COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER – 6% OF THE COMMENTS



The communities surrounding the Strathbogie Ranges are highly active and engaged and believe that a lot more can be undertaken to preserve the forest if they work together. There is interest from people who responded to connect and support Taungurung.

PESTS AND WEEDS (INCLUDING HUNTING) – 5% OF THE COMMENTS



Feral pests and weeds in the Strathbogie Ranges are seen as an issue that need to be better managed. Some of the community organisations are focusing on pests and weeds however it was often raised that more funding and a coordinated program is needed to bring the issue under control. Hunting is seen as a recreational activity, however there are hunters in the Strathbogie Ranges that work to reduce the numbers of feral pests. There are some concerns that the hunting activities could be better managed and licenced hunting brought in to manage the problem.

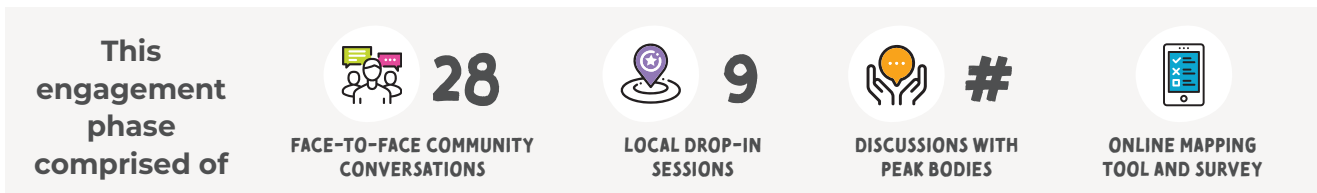
The other key themes captured throughout the engagement included 'knowledge and information' (4%), 'regulation and compliance (including illegal firewood)' (3%), 'legislation and tenure' (3%) and 'climate change' (1%).

All ideas, feedback and comments from across all of the engagement activities were presented and shared with the Panel ahead of the sense-making sessions to develop the recommendations for the Strathbogie Ranges Immediate Protection Area.

2. ENGAGEMENT DESIGN

2.1 OVERVIEW

This report includes the findings of the first phase of the community engagement for the Strathbogie Ranges Immediate Protection Area.



MosaicLab has prepared this report to provide a record of these inputs. This report was provided to the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (the Panel). The Panel considered this report, alongside a wide range of other inputs, in their recommendations to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change.

2.2 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the Panel's engagement was to seek and understand local knowledge and everyday uses that impact the Strathbogie Ranges forest along with the rights and interests of the Traditional Owners, Taungurung.

The Panel outlined the following set of objectives for engagement:

- To create lasting relationships with Traditional Owners and work in partnership throughout the engagement process.
- The community feel listened to, have had a chance to be part of a dialogue with the panel and feel their input was valued and used to inform the panel's recommendations.
- To build greater local understanding of the forest and its needs for the future.
- To support sharing of many different perspectives and give participants the opportunity to access and discuss new ideas and information.
- To ensure a variety of community members and stakeholders from across many perspectives can participate.

2.3 PROCESS

The process of engagement was comprehensive and complex. It considered Traditional Owner cultural values, economic, environmental and social values, and a balance of diverse and divergent views from across the community.

Importance was placed on working with local communities and understanding the issues and opportunities from those who frequent the forest. Equally as important was making sure that the Victorian community had a chance to participate and provide input into the future uses of the forest.

The Panel's role was to provide recommendations and a timeline to the Victorian government on each of the Immediate Protections Areas as part of the plan for how state forests are managed as native timber harvesting ceases in 2030.

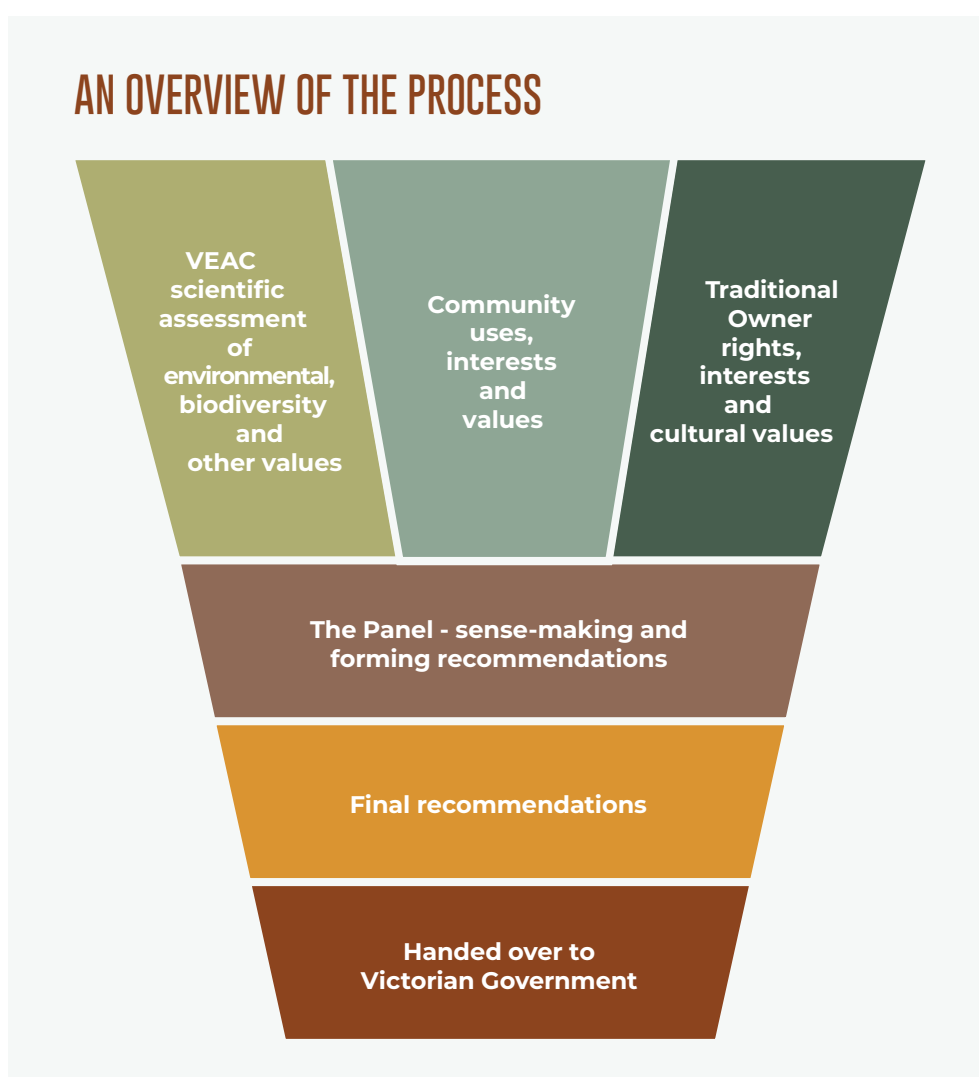


Figure 1 – Overview of process for the Eminent Panel.

2.4 COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

The Panel engaged with a range of stakeholders and community groups. Strategies were developed to drive successful engagement with each stakeholder and community group. Some of the key stakeholders and groups are outlined below, with a full list of organisations directly engaged included in Appendix A.

CATEGORY	GROUP
Partners	Taungurung Land and Waters Council
	Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation
Critical friends	Local Government
	Land managers
	Strathbogie Ranges and surrounds interest groups – cultural, environmental, industry and recreation
	Mirboo North and surrounds interest groups – cultural, environmental, industry and recreation
Critical communities	Local townships
	Landowners adjacent to Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North
	Traditional Owner communities - rights holders
	Young people – future perspective
	Existing community and stakeholder groups
	Regular leisure and recreation community
	Small scale local industries
	High risk fire communities
Peak bodies and industry	State based interest groups - cultural, environmental, industry and recreation
	State Government - Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
	Businesses with interests in Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North
Victoria wide	Wider Victorian community
	Holiday makers

Figure 2 – Stakeholder categories, groups and levels of influence for Phase 1.

2.5 TIMELINE

Phase 1 of the engagement process began in February 2022 with on Country meetings with Taungurung Land and Waters Council.

Engagement and communications planning occurred in March, followed by a series of meetings with critical friends.

Local engagement activities took place from April to May 2022 and included public drop-ins and small group discussions with special interest groups and individuals from the local area.

The Panel then met face to face and online with peak body organisations in late May 2022.

From 3 – 29 May, the Engage Victoria site was live and provided an opportunity for the wider community to put forward their ideas and feedback on the future use of the Strathbogie Ranges.

The Panel undertook sense-making workshops in June 2022, in preparation for their recommendations to be delivered to the Minister.

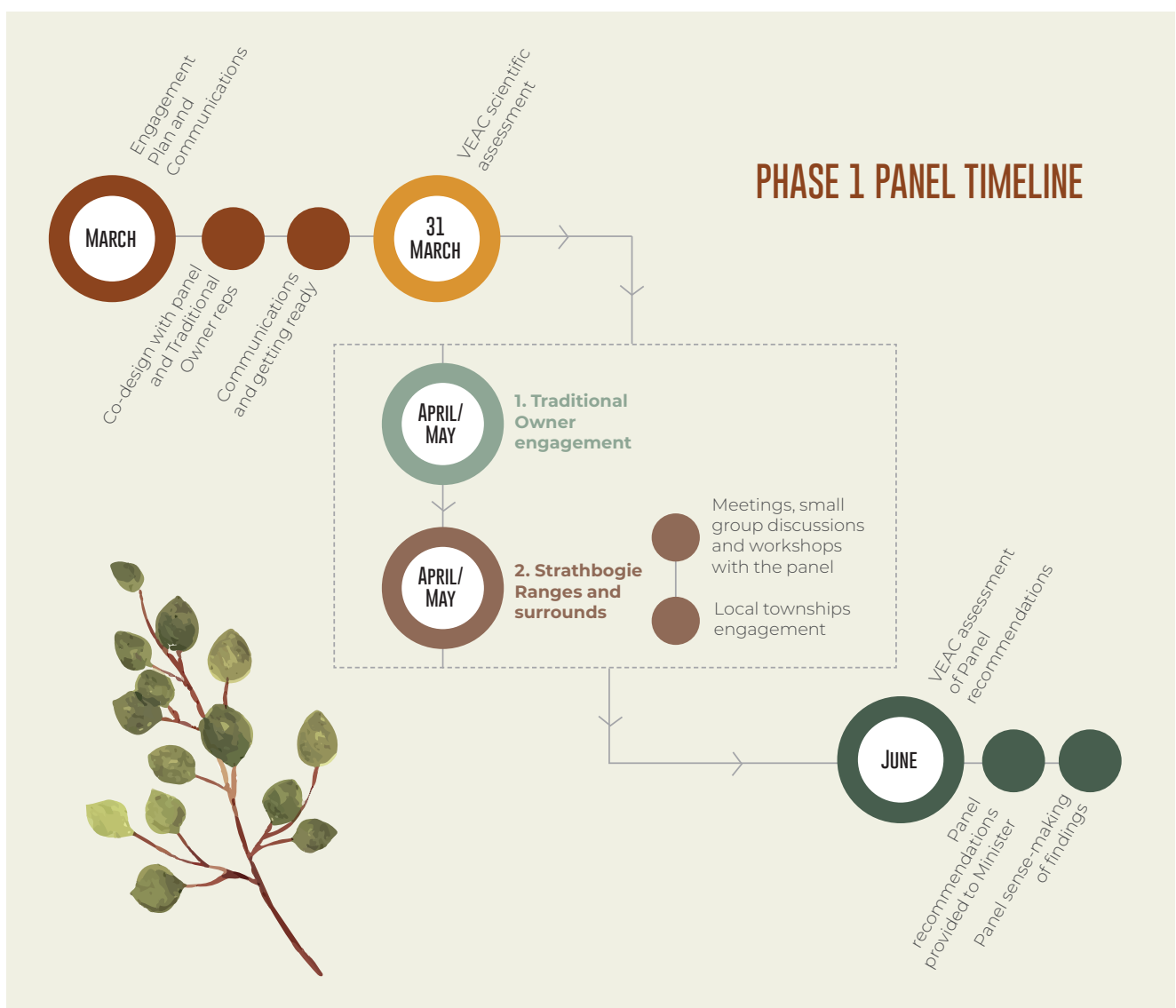


Figure 3 – Phase 1 panel timeline for the Strathbogie Ranges.

2.6 ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

A range of engagement methods was used to seek and identify local interests and values of the forest, and to gather input into strategies for future use and management of the IPA in the Strathbogie Ranges.

The engagement activities included:

- on Country meetings with Taungurung
- targeted small group and individual conversations and workshops
- local drop-ins
- Engage Victoria online survey
- peak body conversations
- forest visits to view current impacts.

These activities enabled the Panel to meet with representatives of each stakeholder, community group or peak body, in order to:

- discuss the role of the Panel and the engagement process for the Immediate Protection Areas
- listen to participants' interests and concerns for the Strathbogie Ranges IPA and surrounding areas
- outline the next steps of the process and discuss timings for key stages.

A summary of meetings is outlined below, and a detailed list of organisations can be found in Appendix 1.

Monday 11 April	Special interest conversations
Tuesday 12 April	Special interest conversations
Monday 9 May	Land managers
	Special interest conversations
	Drop-in session
Tuesday 10 May	Special interest conversations
	Group workshop
Wednesday 11 May	Drop-in session
	Group workshop
Tuesday 17 May	Council meeting
Thursday 19 May	Council meeting
	Special interest conversation

MosaicLab, an independent facilitation and engagement consultancy, was responsible for supporting the Panel in the delivery of the engagement and capturing the conversations with organisations and at the drop-ins. At the end of each session, summary points were drafted as key outcomes of the conversation and shared back with the participating organisation before being shared with the Panel.

2.7 ANALYSIS AND THEMING

MosaicLab analysed the data across all the engagement activities. The results are included in this report. Where possible, the data has been displayed visually to show the recurrence of themes in the conversations. It is important to note that some themes were discussed more than others, even though every effort was made to hear from a balance of perspectives. The process for analysing the data involved examining 'common' or 'like' themes and grouping them together. The themes were then analysed based on the frequency and type of comment and explained with a narrative to provide differing perspectives.

The number of comments and percentages against each theme were calculated based on the total number of comments received in relation to that specific area of interest, activity or, in some cases, the frequency within the theme.



3. ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

3.1 COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

WHAT WE DID (PROCESS)

Local special interest groups in the Strathbogie Ranges area were invited to participate in an initial meeting with the Panel to share information and discuss their experience and ideas about the Strathbogie Ranges IPA. The majority of these meetings were held in person, close to the IPA and included a range of views and interests from cultural, social, environmental and economic backgrounds.

For more detail on the number of meetings held and the participating organisations, please refer to Appendix 1.

KEY THEMES

Based on conversations the Panel had with 21 organisations, these are the key themes:

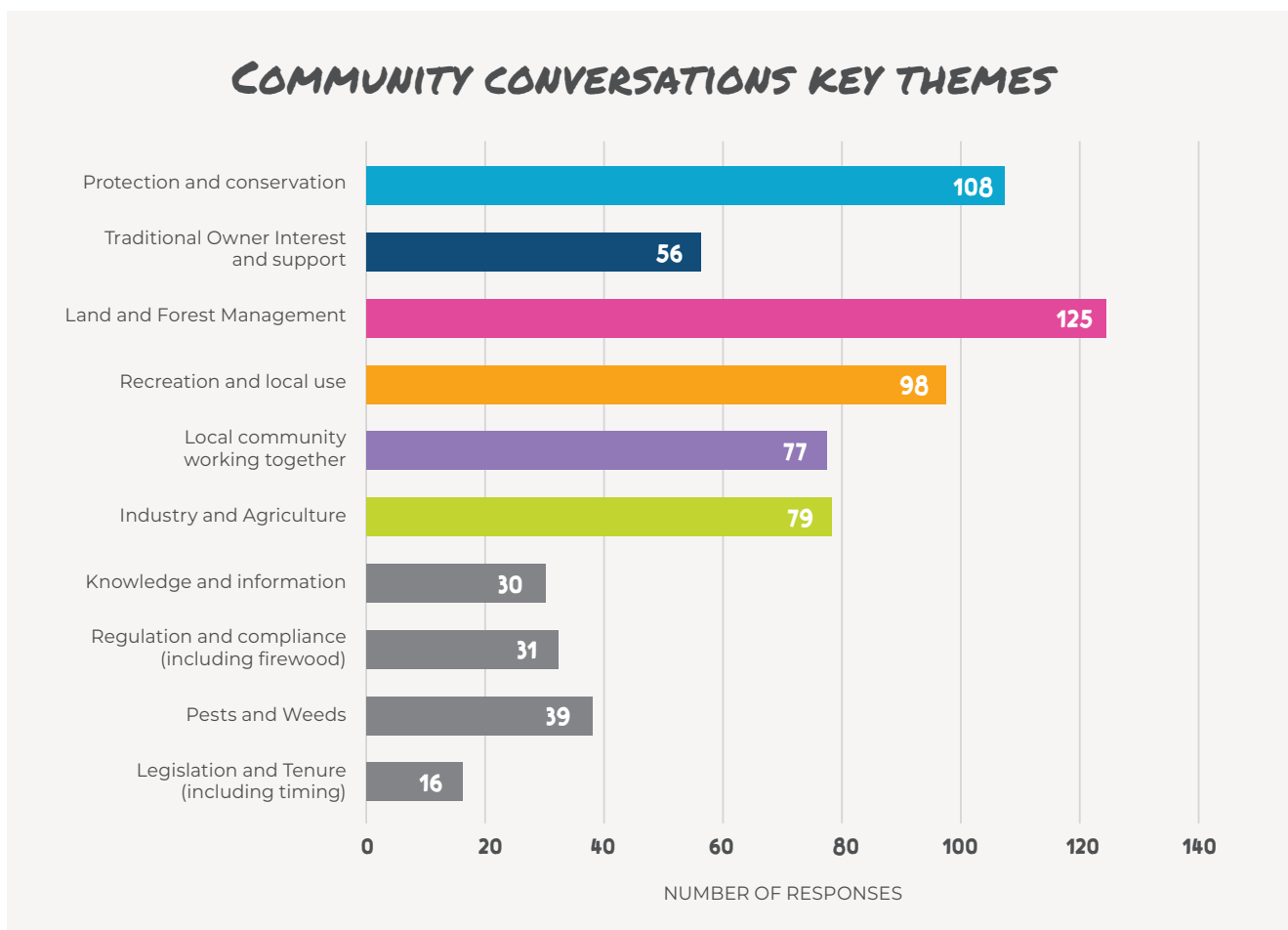


Figure 4 – Graph showing the key themes from the community conversations.

THEME 1 – LAND AND FOREST MANAGEMENT



The land and forest management theme emerged from a combination of responses that talked to the current land, fire and forest management practices undertaken on private and public land. Comments included a range of feedback on government organisations at both the local and state levels and highlighted a level of confusion on who was responsible for the land management in the Strathbogie Ranges area.

Participants gave their perspectives on current land management activities and identified opportunities for additional infrastructure for recreational activities such as camping. They also highlighted the need to adequately manage feral pests and weeds.

“As a land manager I would provide for single tracks for dirt bikes (like they do mountain bikes). If they provided this it would help with the relationship with the forest community”.

“Camping has increased, bringing issues of litter, lack of toilets and facilities.”

“Any future land management plans must include some pest management - feral pests and weeds.”

From the feedback received about land and forest management, 45% of the comments in this theme were directly related to the current land managers, highlighting key concerns about the level of resourcing available and the need to better work across government. One key concern was to make sure that the Strathbogie Ranges are maintained without placing additional financial impact on local government.

“We need to work with the state government to make sure the financial burden does not come back to the council.”

Fire management, including planned burning, covered 32% of the comments captured under this theme. From the participants who discussed fire management, the concerns raised included disagreement with the current planned burns approach and concern for the impact on the environment and the loss of key habitat. In some cases, there were examples of positive previous engagement between groups and the land manager, however it was reported that input into the program has since reduced, causing new concern for impacts on how they use the forest for their future industry (apiary).

There is support from a range of community organisations to better understand fire management using cool burns and through Traditional Owners to care for Country through cultural burning.

“Planned burning, areas that have been destroyed and it makes me not want to walk into the sections, really support Cultural Burning.”

The interface or boundary between public and private land was discussed as not being clear for visitors into the area and there are experiences when activities have spilled out of the forest and onto private land. From the conversations on land and forest management, 25% of the comments in the theme were about adjacent landowners to the Strathbogie Ranges. Some of the participants, commented through direct experience as landowners themselves and talked about the need to manage pests on both private and public land. There were also experiences of people participating illegally in recreation activities on private land without permission and concerns were raised for the safety of residents, property and animals.

“Focus is on the private and state forest interface to manage the pests.”

“Experience with deer hunters with dogs released through the forest. Dogs end up on our property scaring our sheep.”

THEME 2 – PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION



The protection and conservation of Strathbogie Ranges was important to a number of people that the Panel spoke with. The conversations varied within the theme, with 40% talking about the forests being an integral part of people's lives and the importance to care for the forest so that it can be enjoyed by future generations. The need to conserve the ecological and biodiverse values of the Strathbogie Ranges forest and waterways was raised in 32% of the responses in this theme.

"A real integral part of my life. Take people there, a place I appreciate deeply."

When some people talked to the protection of the Strathbogie Ranges, they referred to the previous timber harvesting and the loss of habitat and ecological values. It was felt that it will take time for these values to be restored. It was often acknowledged that the role of the Traditional Owner, Taungurung, in managing Country for cultural and ecological reasons, was the right way forward. (Refer to Traditional Owner theme.)

"Hope for the forest is the highest level of protection (within the reserve system) particularly protection of the biodiversity with the changing climate."

"I lived in the area for 25 years. Seeing how long it takes for the land to repair makes me swallow hard. I am here to represent the country and glad Taungurung are here at the table."

The protection of habitat for endangered species made up 6% of the comments in the protection and conservation theme. Habitats of the Greater Glider are known to exist in the Strathbogie Ranges and it was felt that their habitat should be protected. There is concern with the possibility of further timber harvesting and other high impact activities that the gliders will continue to lose their habitat.

"Parts of the forest that haven't been altered and need to be preserved from all the high-impact activities. We are trying to protect the Greater Gliders, I sometimes see them at night."

THEME 3 – RECREATION AND LOCAL USE



A range of recreation experiences are available in the Strathbogie Ranges and there are divergent views on the level of activity that should occur. The top three current activities that were discussed in the community conversations were opportunities and impacts utilising motorised recreation activities, such as dirt bikes and 4WDs (46% of comments in this theme); the availability of established camp sites and enjoyment of camping (34% of comments in this theme); and support for walking and hiking on tracks and trails (12% of comments in this theme).

"Not a lot of camp sites and no toilets." "More signage is needed for camp sites."

"Low-impact recreational activities are not such an issue. For example, bushwalking, camping in a designated area, bird watching."

The challenge of providing opportunities for high-impact activities whilst preserving and protecting the Strathbogie Ranges was raised by a number of organisations, both in support of the activity, and in opposing the activity. There is recognition from some of the active recreational users that if the right tracks and trails were developed to support use and to directly work with the recreational organisations, a solution can be found.

"As a land manager I would provide for single tracks for dirt bikes (like they do mountain bikes). If they provided this it would help with the relationship with the forest community."

"You find horse riders on the track, they leave a track, Bike riders leave a track but 4WDs destroy the bush."

"Need low-impact facilities to support low-impact leisure activities. Create little paths down into areas to explore, create access for people with disabilities."

Of the people who spoke to this theme, 11% felt there needed to be consideration for what type of facilities support access in and out of the forest as well as future recreational and low-impact activities. It was also raised that it was important to maintain these facilities in the long term and ongoing funding is essential so that this responsibility does not fall to local councils. It was noted that there are more people venturing into the Strathbogie Ranges for a range of activities following the COVID health pandemic. This creates additional pressure on the facilities and highlights the potential need for additional facilities.

"Camping has increased bringing issues of litter, lack of toilets and facilities."

THEME 4 – INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE



The industry and agriculture theme included comments made from participants that captured feedback on past and current timber harvesting practices (33%) through to interest in further developing the Strathbogie Ranges as a tourism destination (33%). Apiary is also an industry that benefits from a healthy forest and 29% of the comments captured in the theme relate to the role apiary can play in the biodiversity of the forest.

“Old primitive clear felling, we will knock it all down and take out the viable timber and then we replant. It is a moon scape.”

The Strathbogie Ranges has a plantation managed by HVP Plantations that is surrounded by the IPA. The timber industry works closely with the land managers and fire management services and invests in good roads and access into the Strathbogie Ranges. They also contribute to fire preparedness and response when required. That being said, there were a number of concerns raised about the current practices and what is seen as destruction of the forest ecosystem and waterways through timber harvesting.

“There was a difference in water quality after the last coupe near my property was logged.”

The interest in developing the area as a tourism destination was supported by 33% of the comments captured in this theme. There was emphasis on supporting businesses that developed eco and cultural tourism opportunities into the future and supporting the surrounding townships with access to good information about the Strathbogie Ranges. Local businesses are often asked for information; however they do not always know or have information on hand.

“Businesses are being asked for local knowledge of what to do and where to go in the area.”

There are 49 apiary sites around the Strathbogie Ranges and there is interest from those we heard from in the industry for them to continue, to support the biodiversity of the region. The apiarists also wanted to continue to be involved in how the land is managed from fire. Planned burning and bushfires greatly impact apiary and they believe that the burns are completed too hot and destroy the habitat for bees.

“With respect to bee keeping, it keeps the forest in good condition.”

THEME 5 – LOCAL COMMUNITY WORKING TOGETHER



There was recognition and acknowledgement of the way the local community connect and work together, with 82% of comments from this theme based on relationships to help work towards a common goal.

“Small community, lots of skills and experience and things just get done.”

There was a strong relationship between those that provided comments to support the ‘protection and conservation’ theme with the ‘local community working together theme’. It is about drawing on the knowledge of the local community and harnessing their interest to preserve and protect the forest. The role of citizen science was discussed and the sharing of data across local community organisations to build better knowledge and a holistic understanding of the Strathbogie Ranges.

“Opportunity to engage the local community on what they observe, provide real-time data, education.”

Working with the community in a range of ways including art-based programs, walking tours with ecologists and Traditional Owners and social gatherings were all suggested as opportunities.

“Our group works on social days as well, BBQ and a chat whilst learning about traditional and not-so-traditional ways to get rid of pests.”

Funding and grants from government agencies for community organisations to support and enable them to work together was supported, with the thinking that so much more could be achieved together rather than alone. 18% of the comments in this theme talked about the reliance on grants, however the effort to navigate and complete the grant application process and conditions sometimes outweighed the benefit of the funding received. It was felt that this could be made easier through greater community ownership to enable the groups to continue working together.

“Grants that are given to the community, give the community so much more ownership.”

THEME 6 – TRADITIONAL OWNER INTEREST AND SUPPORT



The Traditional Owner interest and support theme was not a combination of sub-themes coming together, it was a theme in its own right. There is a desire from the community organisations that the Panel met with to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, Taungurung; to learn and build knowledge and to work with them on managing Country in the Strathbogie Ranges. The support was captured from groups across a range of backgrounds, including environmental groups, recreational groups and industry groups.

“We are keen to look at the transition across to Traditional Owner management and we would be happy to support it.”

There is recognition from a number of groups that the role of Taungurung in managing Country may take time to transition and support will be needed from a range of sources, including the local community. There are opportunities to look at employment for Taungurung to manage Country.

“It will take some time to bring Traditional Owner practice into the landscape and it will take community to support it.”

“Forest related employment - education about restoration. Taungurung might consider this as a way forward, could be from weed management right through to spiritual connection.”

The panel heard from some groups that they need to better understand Taungurung's interests and ways of managing Country and what it would mean for how they wanted to participate in activities in the forest. There was an openness and willingness to understand this.

“The relationship needs to grow and better understanding to protect the forest, be mindful of the local Indigenous people and their aspirations, and if that means I am not allowed to ride my bike there then it is important I acknowledge that.”

It was also shared that there were some concerns for the Strathbogie Ranges to be over-governed or 'locked away' if there was a greater role for Taungurung to manage Country.

“TO's have their opinion, and I have my opinion, my opinion of sharing is being able to go into the forest without it being over-governed.”

Additional themes



Other themes included:

- Management of feral pests and weeds, including the role hunting plays in managing the feral animal issue.
- Regulation and compliance and concern that little compliance occurs, particularly when it includes to illegal firewood collection.
- Building knowledge and information about the Strathbogie Ranges through interpretative and directional signs and presence on the ground.
- Future legislation and tenure to be timely and support the future conservation and protection of the Strathbogie Ranges.

3.2 LOCAL DROP-INS

WHAT WE DID (PROCESS)

The Panel visited the Strathbogie Ranges to undertake wider community drop-in sessions in Euroa on 9 May and Strathbogie on 11 May. Across this time 25 individuals and family groups came in to share their ideas about the future IPA.

9 May 2022 4:00 – 8:00pm Euroa Football Club	11 May 2022 8:30 – 11:00am Strathbogie Hall
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Participants were invited to respond to the following questions:

- Share your ideas on how a healthy forest can be created and maintained for everyone.
- What activities do you currently participate in?
- What do you imagine future generations will want to be reminded of when they visit the forest?
- How do you think future generations will want to enjoy the forest?

Their responses were captured on sticky notes and butchers' paper and analysed into key themes.

KEY THEMES

Based on conversations with the drop-in participants, these are the key themes:

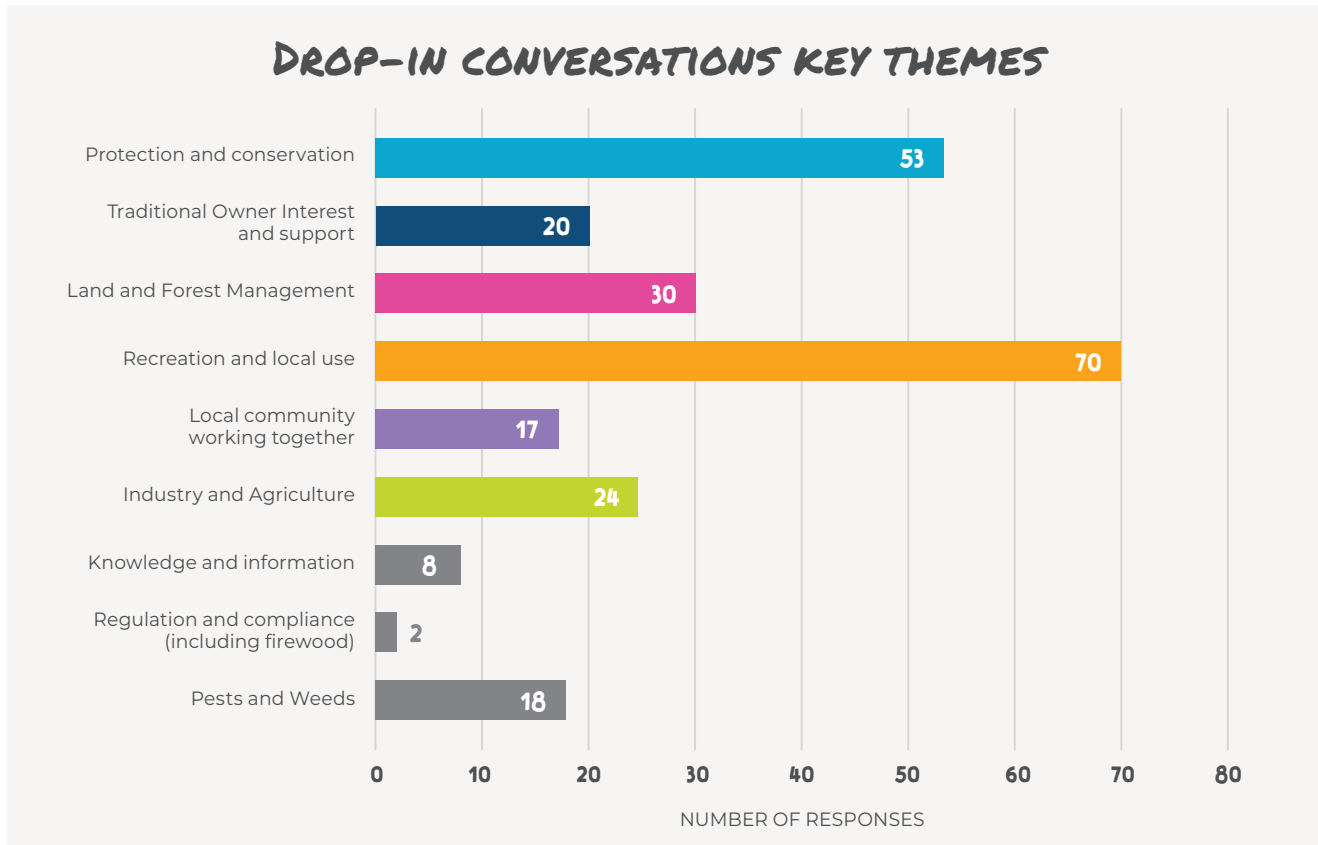


Figure 5 - Graph showing the key themes from the drop-in sessions.

THEME 1 – RECREATION AND LOCAL USE



The divergent views on recreational activities in the Strathbogie Ranges was evident in the comments captured by participants. Recreational users would like more suitable tracks in areas that do not hold high conservation values and wanted to be able to continue participating in the activities they enjoy, whilst some felt there is no place for motorised vehicles in the forest at all.

"I walk, ride, sleep, gather food and restore my joy in the forest."

"I don't mind the mix use of trail bikes - we need to sacrifice parts of the forest for all use."

"Accept that I have to share the forest with trail bike riders & 4WDs – it's hard to police."

Some forest users who participated in the drop-ins talked about the disruption to peaceful activities such as walking and bird watching, however there was recognition of a right to access the forest like everyone else.

"When we're walking peacefully we don't like the noisy bikes. But they have as much right. 1-2 bikes are OK but big groups do so much damage."

There was continued support for camping in the Strathbogie Ranges however it was suggested that designated camp sites should be established with compostable toilets. Other suggestions included moving camping sites closer to the townships and on the periphery of the forest.

"Designated camp sites to limit camping all over the forest. Drops (composting) toilets in key places to limit toilet paper etc everywhere."

THEME 2 – PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION



Sharing the knowledge and caring for the forest was a strong theme that came through the drop-ins when people spoke to protection and conservation. There is interest in encouraging greater connection to the forest and to recognise and respect the forest as a living, breathing entity.

"ON BEHALF OF THE FOREST. We request that all meetings and decision making take place IN the forest, in the presence of all those who'll be impacted by management practices."

There was interest in making sure the biodiversity of the region continues, not just to support the endangered species, but for all native species. Concern still remains about the impact of timber harvesting and what this will do for habitat loss and food sources for wildlife. There were some suggestions to work with private landowners to make sure that appropriate wildlife corridors are in place. It was suggested that landowners could provide a covenant and in return the local council could reduce their rates. There is an opportunity to explore this with local councils.

"Local wildlife concern - we need more eucalyptus on private property (corridors). Koala numbers are dropping."

"Look at offsets - farmers provide a covenant and in turn get a rate reduction."

THEME 3 – LAND AND FOREST MANAGEMENT



There was a strong sub-theme coming through the drop-ins for local government to take a greater role in working with the adjacent landowners to support biodiverse landscapes and to assist with the coordination of information and data collection relating to the Strathbogie Ranges at a local level.

“Strathbogie Council needs to partner with farmers on the perimeter for agroforestry.”

There were a number of comments about future land and forest management that supported greater involvement from Taungurung and bringing together a range of diverse voices to work directly with the land manager. There is a sentiment that together, there is a chance to manage the land and forest more effectively and to create measures that monitor the performance of the land manager.

“Some of the performance measures i.e. we need to green in this area by %.”

“People with diverse range of interests to work with land managers.”

Fire management, and the fire safety of townships, was more prevalent an issue in the drop-ins. There is still a concern that roads and tracks are properly maintained and that appropriate fire management practices are in place. The practice of cool burns and cultural burns remains something some people would like to see more of, however there is concern that the Traditional Owners will not be resourced to manage Country.

“Happy about the IPA but we still want tracks maintained for fire management.”

“Traditional Owners - will they be resourced and have the money to manage the country? Concern on future fire management.”

THEME 4 – INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE



Similar to the community conversations, there were a few comments made by drop-in participants about the current timber industry and their view on ceasing timber harvesting immediately. There were however a few different views that talked to the role the timber industry could play to establish wildlife corridors through their properties and allowing bikes to utilise the plantations for recreational riding.

“On the plantation, there is an opportunity for a particular project/program to support wildlife corridors.”

“Bikes in plantation forest is fine.”

There were a small number of comments captured at the drop-ins about mining and the exploration of gold and minerals. The sentiment was that it should not occur within the Strathbogie Ranges as it damages the forest beyond rehabilitation.

“Suggest stopping mining because of damage to the area that often does not get rehabilitated.”

THEME 5 – TRADITIONAL OWNER INTERESTS AND SUPPORT

It was captured in the drop-ins that Taungurung should have representation and decision-making powers as part of the future management of the Strathbogie Ranges. Greater presence and opportunity to work alongside the current land manager was considered and a greater presence of language and culture within the Strathbogie Ranges.



“We request that Taungurung mob have effective representation on the decision-making/management body.”

“Naming and language opportunities with Taungarung.”

Additional themes



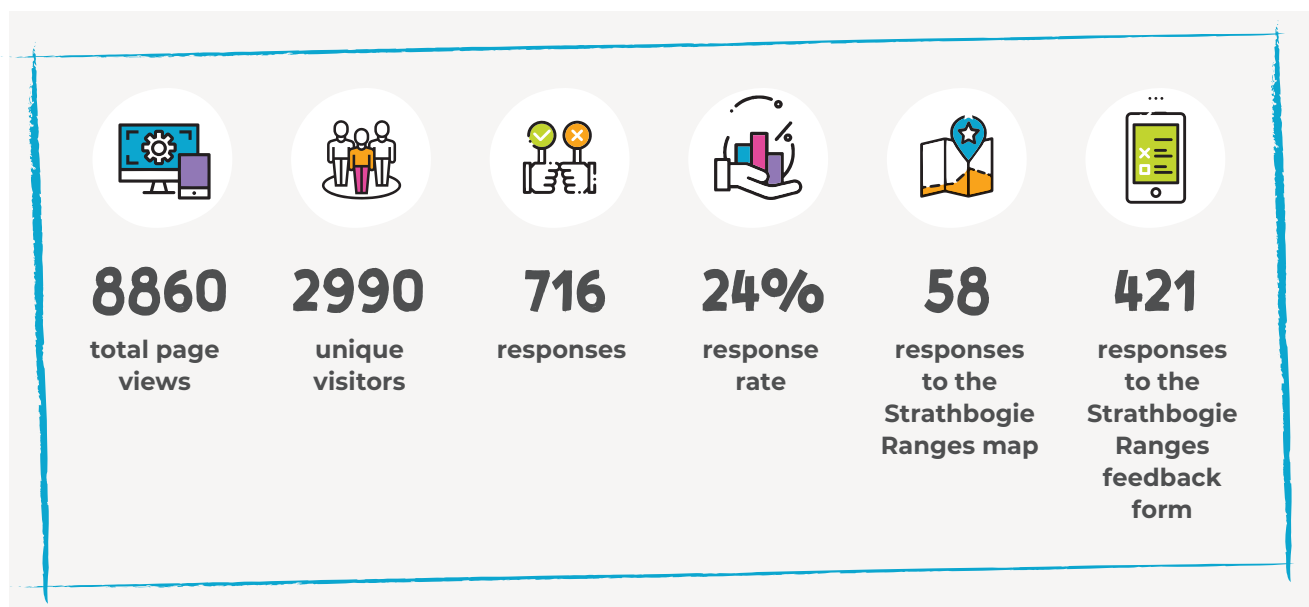
Other themes included:

- Managing pests and weeds by working with the adjacent landowners and government to eradicate pests.
- Local community working together in a range of partnerships, like “a multi-perspective caretaker”.
- Regulation and compliance and concern that little compliance occurs, particularly when it includes to enforcing camping and the waste that is left behind.
- Building knowledge and information about the Strathbogie Ranges through online platforms that share localised information about walks and through social media.

3.3 ENGAGE VICTORIA ONLINE PLATFORM

The wider Victorian community provided feedback on the future uses of the Strathbogie Ranges and the Mirboo North IPAs through the Victorian Government's online engagement platform Engage Victoria. The website included background information, details on the role of the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement and an overview of the engagement process. It went live on 3 May 2022 and closed on 29 May 2022 and brought together a map survey and feedback form for both the Mirboo North and Strathbogie Ranges IPAs.

Across the four weeks it was live, the site received:



WHAT WE DID (PROCESS)

The community was provided with an introduction and clear call to action about how they were able to participate and provide ideas for the future use of the IPAs.

People were invited to participate in multiple ways:

- Looking at the maps and dropping a pin to tell us why this part of the forest was important to them.
- Completing a short feedback form.
- Visiting the panel at one of the pop-up locations in May.
- Reading the background information (Engage Victoria)."

The site provided links to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's webpage on the IPAs, links to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's land and cultural value assessments of the IPAs and FAQs.

The key findings below are based on the responses received for the Strathbogie Ranges.

MAP SURVEY - KEY FINDINGS

Participants placed a pin on the part of the forest that was important to them and shared why this area was important. People responded to the type of activities they participated in (41%), certain areas that should be preserved and protected (41%) and issues and opportunities with land and forest management (6%) of the Strathbogie Ranges. Overall there were 58 responses.

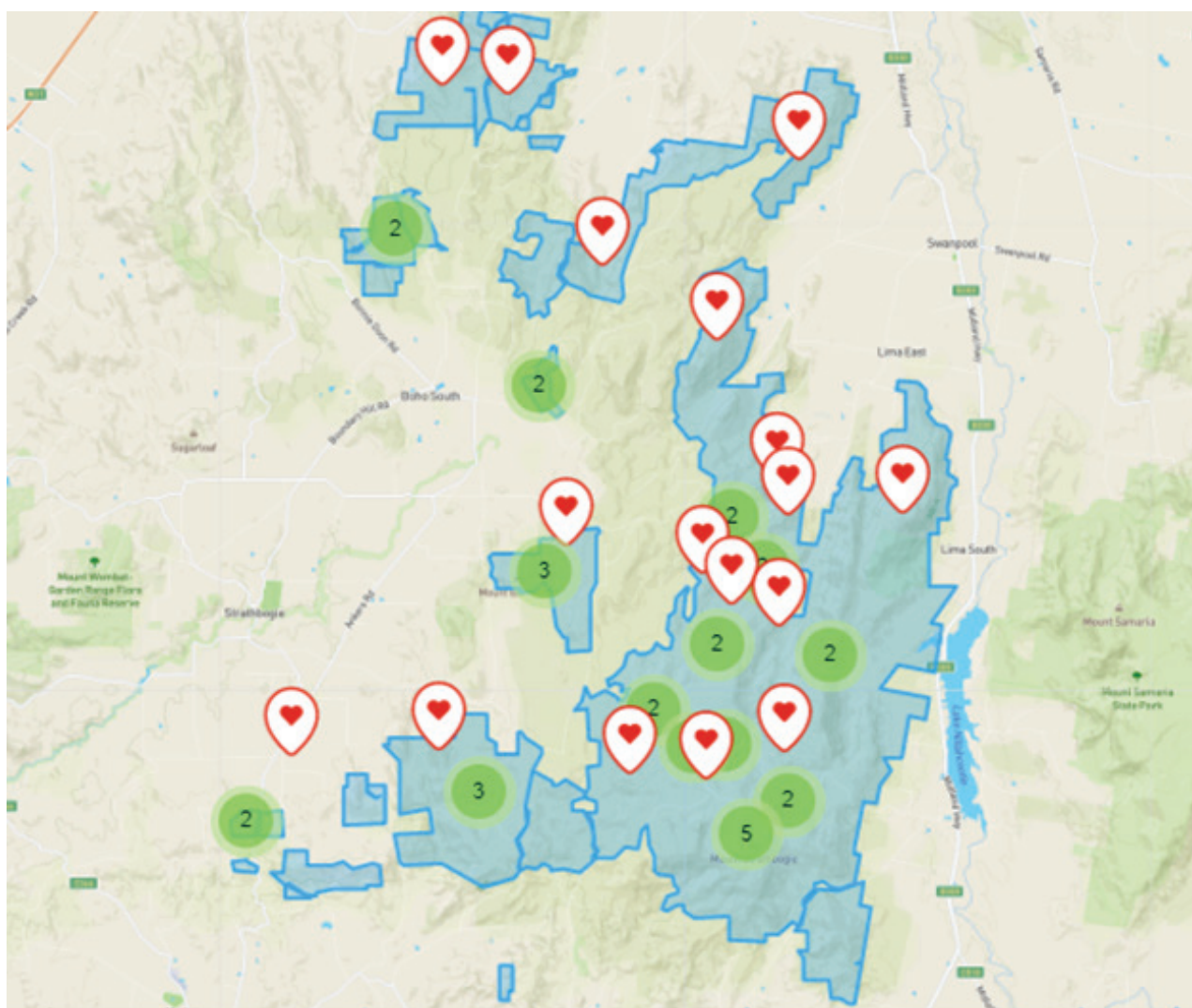


Figure 6 - Map showing the spread of comments on Engage Victoria.

SURVEY QUESTIONS – KEY FINDINGS

In addition to the map survey above, a separate survey asked four questions to understand current and futures uses within the IPA (quantitative questions one and three) and future based questions that drew out the values of what was important to people when thinking about managing the Strathbogie Ranges (qualitative questions two and four).

1. What activities do you currently participate in?

Overall 421 participants responded to the survey. Question one was designed to understand the current level of interest and activity in the Strathbogie Ranges. The activities were provided as options along with a category for 'other', and multiple answers were able to be selected.

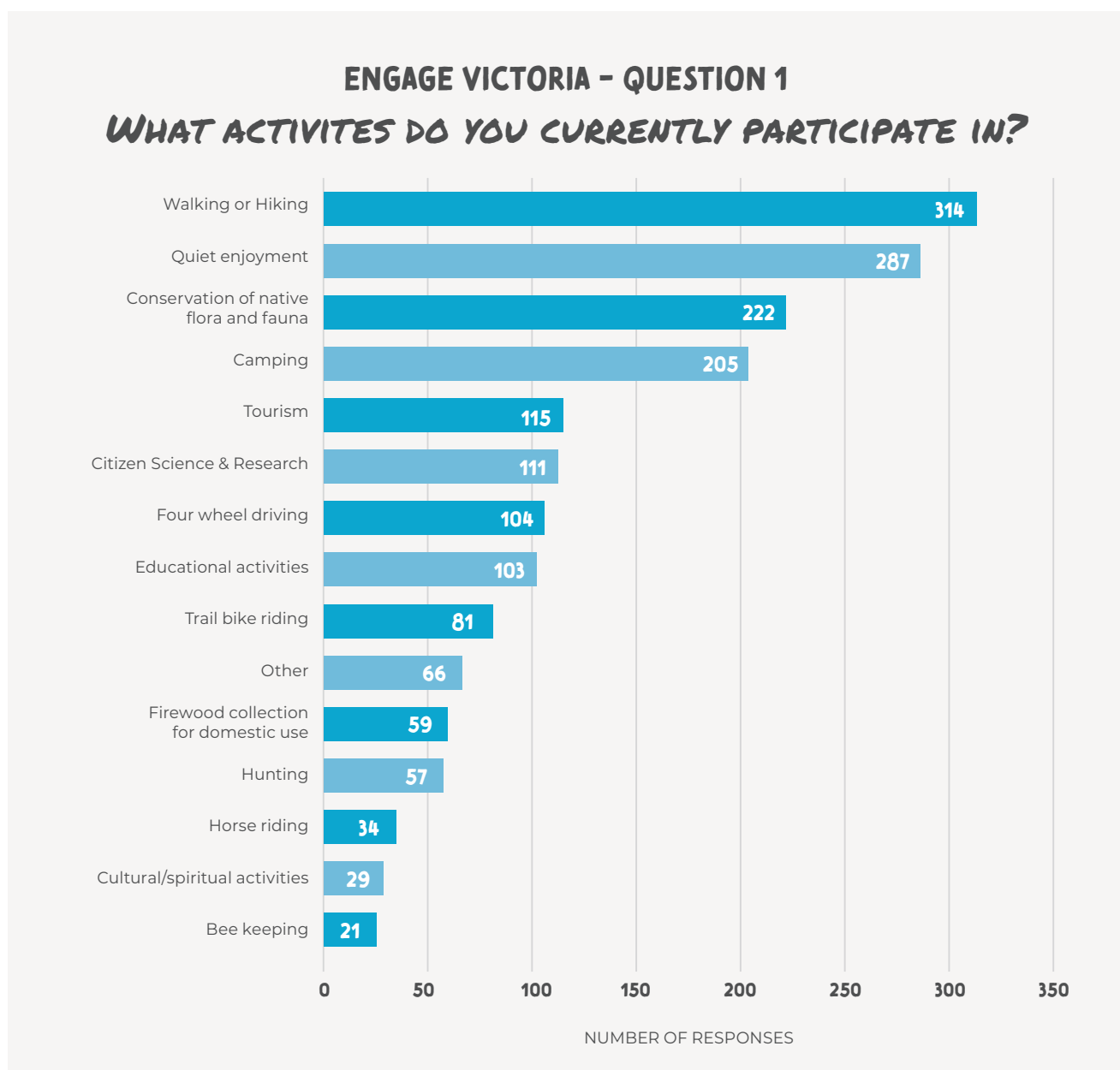


Figure 7 - Graph showing the key themes from Question 1, Engage Victoria.

2. Share your ideas on how a healthy forest can be created and maintained for everyone

Question two was designed to better understand the wider community sentiment on what a healthy forest would look like and how it could be sustained over time. The question also gave participants an opportunity to explore the idea of a forest for 'everyone' and what it would take to balance multiple uses.

From the 421 responses, these are the key themes that emerged from participants' answers to question two:

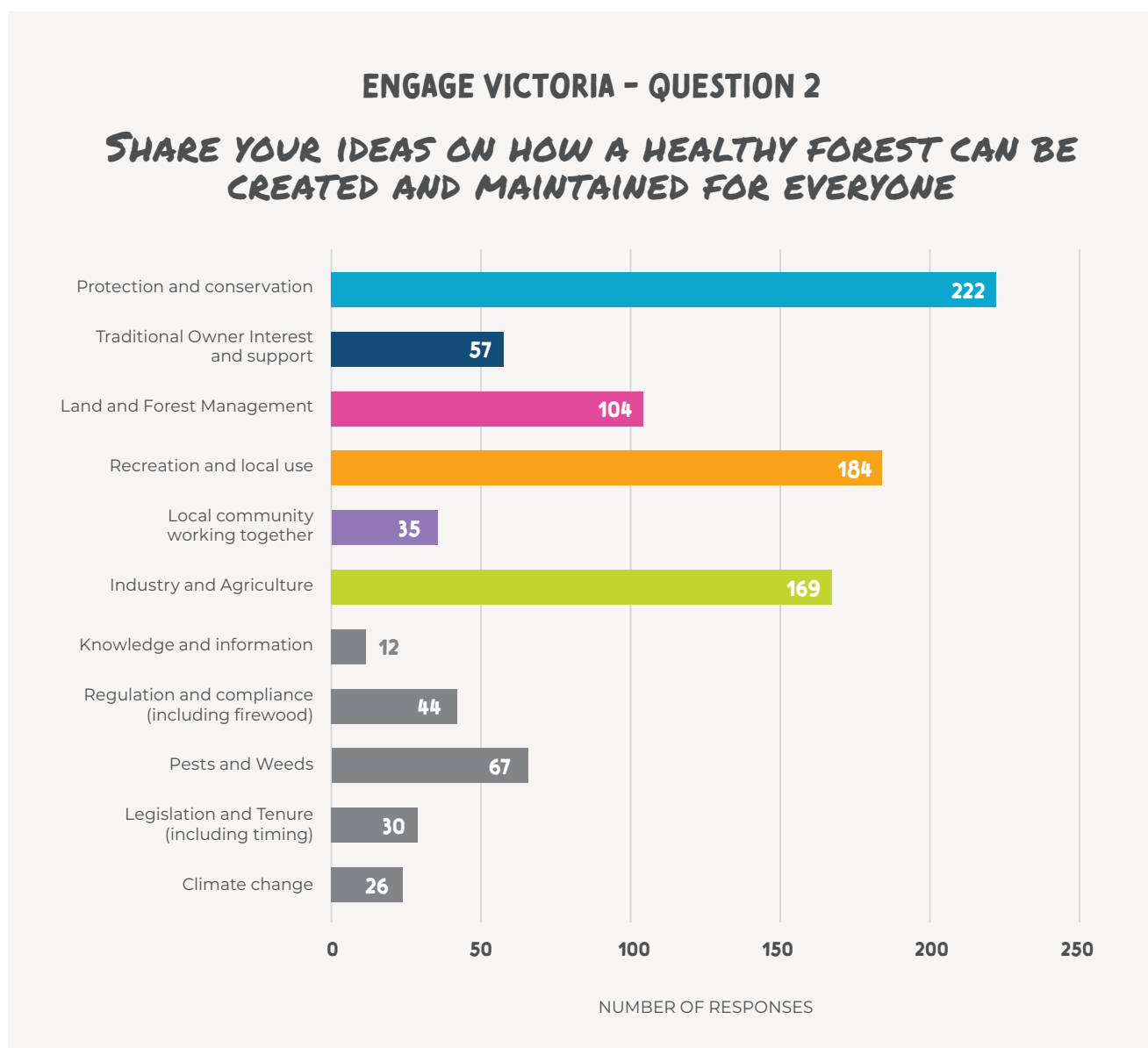


Figure 8 - Graph showing the key themes from Question 2, Engage Victoria.

THEME 1 – PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

The Strathbogie Ranges was noted for its rich biodiversity. Like the community conversations, many respondents in this theme talked about the endangered species and the need to preserve their habitats so that they survive and thrive (33% of responses in this theme). There was a mix of views about leaving the forest to manage on its own or to purposely manage by shutting areas off to support regeneration and conservation.



“Open certain areas at a time whilst shutting areas to allowing other areas to recover both plant growth and native animal conservation.”

“Even dead trees provide essential habitat and should remain in the landscape where safe.”

Considering the forest as a whole system to preserve and protect was important for 31% of responses in this theme. There was a distinct message of encouragement to look at the forest at different levels such as the canopy right down to the ground cover, and at different times of the year, to see how it develops and provides for the rich animal life. There is a belief that experiencing the forest and seeing it as an ecosystem provides a way for the community to connect with the forest.

“Strathbogie forest is a working community. It contains large trees we can all see but below the trees are ground cover and understorey plants. In the soil a rich range of micro organisms create a living sponge which provides life for the plants as well as insects, birds and mammals possums, gliders, antechinus. There are also reptiles and amphibians, there are seasonal visitors, birds down from the high plateau, wallabies in from the grasslands. All this complex life deserves to exist for its own sake whether humans see it or not.”

Knowledge and care for the forest is still something that is considered important by people who responded to this question. From the responses in this theme, 30% of participants felt connection and knowledge helped to create and maintain a healthy forest. There was acknowledgement of the heritage and history of the Strathbogie Ranges from Traditional Owners managing the land through to the timber workers, working the land. Learning and connecting with the past was seen as a way to nurture a healthy forest into the future.

“I think the important thing is that a community that uses its forest is aware of the changes in the forest and the condition of the forest. There can then be ongoing knowledge sharing and care ongoing with people local to that area.”

“I grew up surrounded by forests and my grandfather was a sawmill. I have been taught respect for trees and forests and respecting our land.”

THEME 2 – RECREATION AND LOCAL USE



Divergent views about the type of recreation activities supported in the Strathbogie Ranges remain consistent with what was captured in the community conversations and drop-ins. The participants who supported the use of motorised vehicles in the forest would like to see more suitable tracks in areas that do not hold a high conservation value, whilst other participants felt there is no place for motorised vehicles in the forest at all. 32% of the responses in this theme were about the use of motorised vehicles, 30% supported multiple uses of the forest and 20% spoke to unmotorised uses of the Strathbogie's forest.

“Certain areas appeal to trail bike riders , and other areas may appeal more to hiking and mountain bike riders. It would be ideal to try and section areas for each discipline and promote these activities for each area.”

“Allow activities with minimum impact on the forest, such as walking, cultural activities, science/ monitoring, educational tours for all ages tourism, film/video making and school groups. Walk-in camping in designated areas with controlled numbers.”

There were mixed reactions about specifically designated areas for particular activities. It was thought of as a way to manage the competing uses and potential safety concerns. On the other hand, some people thought that designated areas would be over used and worn out and wondered where they would be located next. The participants recognise and see the complex situation of balancing multiple recreational activities whilst also managing the conservation of the forest.

“The only issue with ‘designated areas’ is that with limited funding, these areas can become over used and worn out quickly.”

The perception is that if the forest is protected, a range of activities are not going to be possible. Some participants the Panel heard from felt that the Strathbogie Ranges should better managed, remain open and enjoyed by all. The idea that people can recreate in such a natural environment was believed to support healthy bodies and healthy minds.

“Forests need to be open for everyone to enjoy, not a national park. Need better camping facilities, sign posting of walks and trails, toilets, better advertising of what is in the forests to attract more users.”

“Limit bush camping to designated areas around the margins of the forest. Support establishment of camping facilities in nearby townships e.g. Strathbogie.”

THEME 3 – INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE



The use of timber harvesting in the Strathbogie Ranges is still on the minds of people who responded to the survey. There are differing views about timber harvesting, from ceasing altogether, through to active management and regeneration of the plantations. There were some comments that spoke to supporting a sustainable timber industry. Whilst 79% of the comments in this theme relate to the timber industry, the Strathbogie Ranges was placed under immediate protection when the Victorian Forestry Plan was announced. The theme therefore will reflect the wider industry and agricultural views of the area.

There is interest from people who participated in the survey to cease all commercial activity within the IPA other than environmentally-focused tourism. There is also interest in building cultural tourism opportunities with Taungurung. Supporting tourism and smaller industries in the area is seen as way of creating local jobs and opportunities for the community.

“Eliminate all commercial ventures other than passive environmental tourism.”

“Allow activities with minimum impact on the forest, such as tourism and film/ video making.”

There were a number of responses (7% of responses to this theme) that discussed the negative impacts of mining and gold and mineral exploration. The respondents felt that mining should not continue as it is harmful to the forest ecosystem.

“Mining, including prospecting, must not be undertaken in the forest as it causes unfixable damage to the forest ecosystem.”

There were only a small number of comments that related to apiary or bee keeping and they were divergent views that talked to harmful competition for native bees from European bees through to supporting the agriculture sector through bees pollinating the food crops that are in close proximity to the Strathbogie Ranges.

THEME 4 – LAND AND FOREST MANAGEMENT

The land and forest management theme related to the supply and management of infrastructure and facilities (36% of responses to this theme), the impact of planned burning and preparation for natural disasters (29% of responses to this theme), land managers and government (26% of responses to this theme) and adjacent and surrounding landholders (9% of responses to this theme).



The participants in the survey recognised the need for a range of infrastructure and facilities to support access in and out of the forest and to provide a balance of recreational and low-impact activities. There were also some responses that opposed infrastructure or facilities that supported commercial ventures.

“Ensuring road and recreation site maintenance is continually improved to ensure activities continue while limiting impacts on the natural values and water quality.”

“Provide facilities to encourage all to visit our forests including accessible facilities for all and dispersed vehicle based camping.”

“Don’t allow new roads, buildings, ‘fun’ activities or publicly or privately funded infrastructure (kiosks) for private profit”

Fire management, and the fire safety of townships was on the minds of some people who responded. There were also people who felt that unnecessary and damaging planned burns took place in areas such as the Strathbogie Ranges and that it destroys the ecosystem and habitat of the animals within the forest.

“Fire breaks need to be put in, yearly back burning NEEDS to be done to allow re-generation, keep it clean in general and it also helps reduce the risk of a major bushfire.”

“The Strathbogie Forest’s Greater Glider population is found in the vegetation type Herb-rich Foothill Forest, in State Forest, where its highest-quality habitat is being progressively degraded by a combination of timber harvesting and planned fuel-reduction burning.”

There was a range of comments that talked to the current land managers in the region and the need to adequately fund them so that the forests can be more effectively managed. Participants raised that active management is needed and there needed to be a focus on managing pests and weeds as well as maintenance of tracks and roads. There were some comments that felt community organisations, Traditional Owners and/or local government should have a greater role in managing the forest.

“A healthy forest requires active management.”

“Managed by the National Parks in collaboration with the Traditional Owners of the land.”

“Council management, Landcare and PMAV groups working together.”

“By adequately funding land managers to effectively control pest species and, at the very least, maintain current biological values.”

THEME 5 – PESTS AND WEEDS (INCLUDING HUNTING)



There is a lot of concern from people who responded to the survey about feral pests (animals) and weeds and that they need to be managed more effectively. Pests and weeds have been a consistent issue of concern across the community conversations, the drop-ins and the online engagement. The feral animal population consistently recalled includes deer, pigs and foxes. There is concern that they are damaging the integrity of the forest and are in numbers that are too hard to manage with recreational hunting alone.

“A healthy forest is one that is protected from damaging human and feral impacts. So protection from feral species and damaging human activity is mandatory. The forests must be protected and managed to evolve and thrive naturally.”

“Access for all to the forest, I enjoy hunting and exploring the forest. I often use hounds or gundogs as part of my hunting method. Healthy forests are not choked with black berries.”

At the moment, hunting is a legal activity in the Strathbogie Ranges and a regularly reported use from participants and observers. There is a lot of concern about feral animals and the need to manage them safely and humanely. Specifically, it has been suggested that licensed trappers and a permit system is introduced to manage the population of deer.

“Only licenced trappers to remove feral animals, no hunting.”

“Provide permits during limited periods for shooting of feral deer and advertise it Gun Clubs and inform the general public the season dates.”

“Declare deer a pest species, provide the resources to land managers for a significant increase in the resources to manage the weeds and pests in our forests.”

Additional themes



Other themes included:

- Traditional Owner interest and support – there is a desire to learn and understand how Taungurung manage Country and what this might look like going forward.
- Regulation and compliance (including firewood) – it is felt that there is very little understanding or compliance on the activities in the Strathbogie Ranges. There is concern for the removal of illegal firewood and the minimal presence of land managers in the Strathbogie Ranges.
- Local community working together – enabling the community to work together for the future protection of the Strathbogie Ranges.
- Legislation and tenure (including timing of changes) – there was concern about the type of tenure and timing for change to support greater protection of the conservation values.
- Climate change – there is a relationship between people who responded to the theme of protection and conservation of the forest and the impact on climate change.
- Knowledge and information – there is interest in further research and citizen science processes to build a better understanding of the forest.

3. How do you think future generations will want to enjoy the forest? What will they do here?

Question three was designed to understand how people saw future generations enjoying the forest in the Strathbogie Ranges. The activities were provided as options with a further category for 'other' and multiple answers were able to be selected.

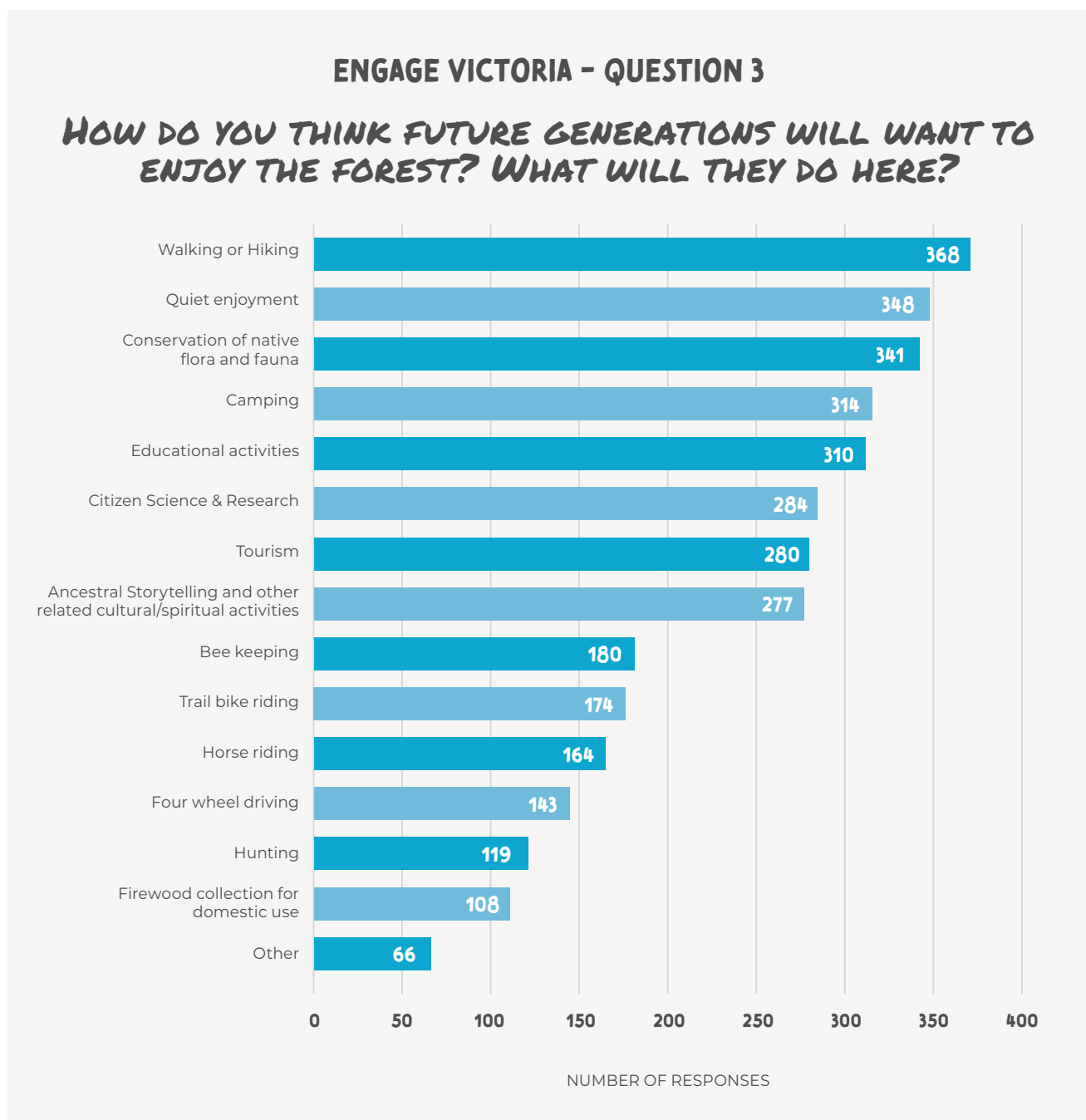


Figure 9 - Graph showing the key themes from Question 3, Engage Victoria.

4. What do you imagine future generations will want to be reminded of when they visit the forest?

Question four was designed to better understand the values the participants think are important to maintain. The wider community sentiment works towards what people see as the legacy as future generations visit the Strathbogie Ranges.

From the 421 responses, these are the key themes in answer to question four:

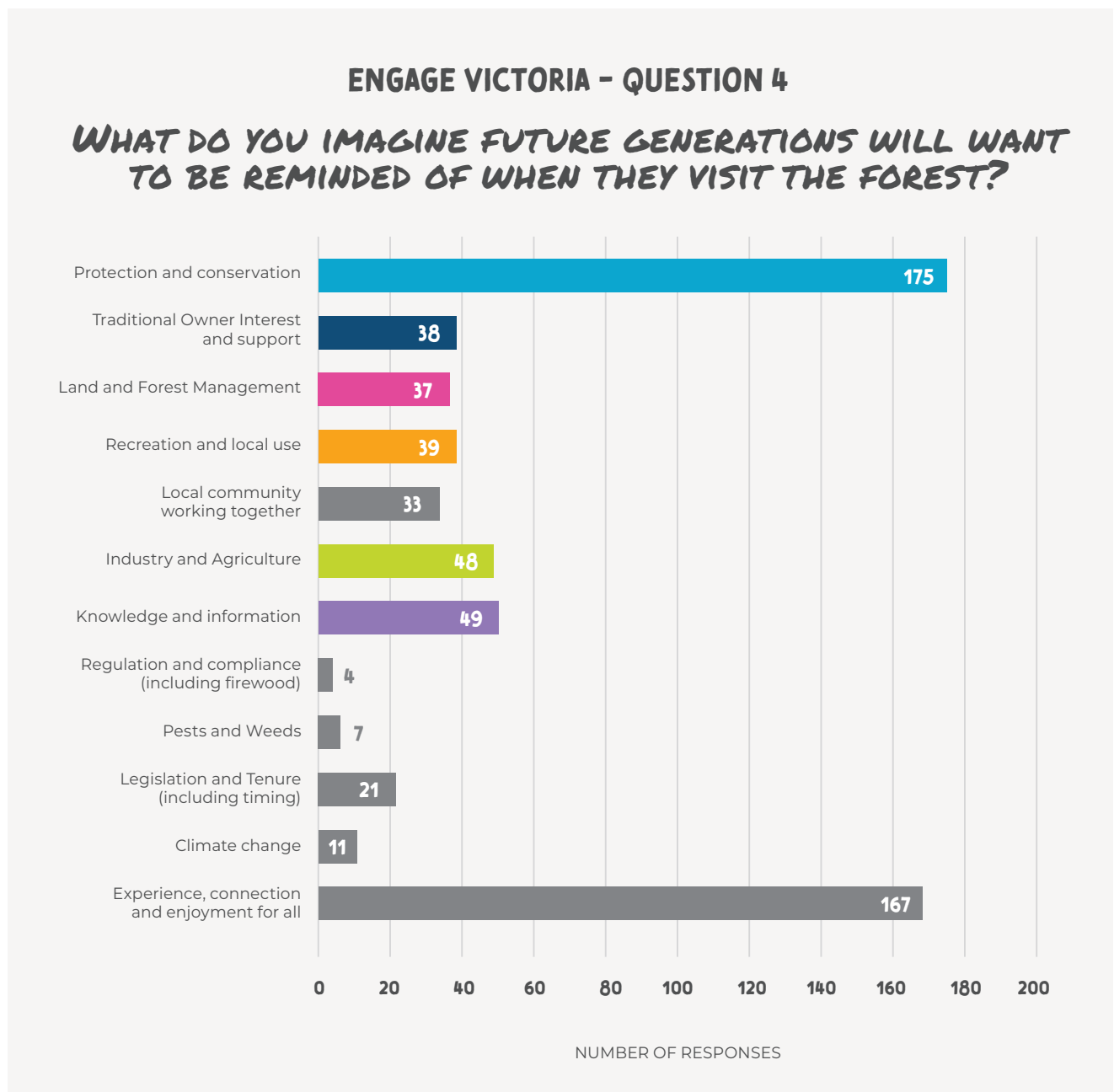


Figure 10 - Graph showing the key themes from Question 4, Engage Victoria.

THEME 1 – PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION



The people who responded to this question felt that there needs to be great effort to preserve the Strathbogie Ranges ecological values and biodiversity now for future generations to enjoy (93% of the responses to this theme). The uniqueness of the area and the impact it can have locally and globally (through reducing the impacts of climate change) were captured in a positive and uplifting way.

“We have a unique and critically important opportunity to preserve the plants, animals, and the entire ecosystem for all to see and enjoy.”

“That people took a stand for nature and recognised the vital importance of each individual ecosystem as a contributor to global biodiversity and thriving of the planet.”

“That it is being looked after. Not by some unfounded notion of ‘wilderness’ but by using actual ecological principles. That Traditional Owners’ rights and aspirations are not only respected but facilitated.”

There is a sense of hope and pride in how people worked together to achieve the protection and conservation of the forest.

“How previous generations of community and government agencies worked together to preserve and protect our forests for future generations to enjoy and benefit from by not destroying these forests.”

A small percentage of responses to this theme (5%) reflected on the impact that humans have made and that future generations will pass judgement on how the current generation managed the planet.

“How stupid our generations were in our planet management.”

“How humans are only a part of life on Earth, and how we can live with it and enjoy it without destroying the biodiversity.”

THEME 2 – EXPERIENCE, CONNECTION AND ENJOYMENT FOR ALL



Like theme one, theme two had a positive outlook on the future of the Strathbogie Ranges from a range of perspectives. Experiencing the natural environment and connecting with the forest was a strong sub-theme (51% of responses). For future generations to come and enjoy the quiet and natural values of the area was something that the participants want future generations to experience.

“They will want to come and feel the quiet and nature and wonder at the amazing place they can sit in.”

“The same as us, we want the freedom to explore, amazing views, swimming holes, the beauty of nature.”

There was also recognition that the future generations will enjoy the natural beauty of the forest and feel great respect and privilege for the experience (29% of responses to this theme). Some comments reflected that future generations will value this beauty more than the current generation.

“Future generations will be more aware than ever of the importance and beauty of nature.”

“That forests are precious, valued and an intrinsic part of our way of life, and that this generation had the guts to make the changes to enable a vast increase in forest coverage and sustainable agriculture.”

A sub-theme that stood out in the online engagement was the enjoyment of the forest for all. It brought together a focus on quiet enjoyment within nature through to recreational activities so people can enjoy the forest in multiple ways.

“That the forest is there for all to enjoy, not locked up with restricted access to the public.”

“Visiting a forest will remind people of the simple joys in life and all that the world has to offer.”

THEME 3 – KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION

Looking forward, the participants who responded in this theme wanted the history to be recognised and observed as a way of building knowledge and understanding of the forest and the people who frequent it for work or leisure. There was a sentimentality about the history of the region, going back through time to better understand and educate the community on Traditional Owner and Aboriginal management of Country as well as the management of the forests through a forestry lens. The history is diverse and 88% of the responses in this theme talk to capturing the history in some way.



“History of the forest - both Traditional Owner and more recent European groups have utilised and sustainably managed the forest.”

“History. Like the salt mines, it would be nice to see good signage and historic markers throughout the forests, reminding bush users of past uses of our forests.”

“The history of the loggers that once logged in the Strathbogie ranges. My children love hearing the history of the loggers and the mining that once was there.”

THEME 4 – INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE

The future focus of the question captured reflections on moving forward with the timber industry. This comprised comments that referred to the cessation of timber harvesting and the role of the current generation in supporting this, through to the concern and welfare for timber workers and the townships that have grown and developed from the timber industry (71% of responses to this theme). Whilst it is still a divergent view from those that responded, there was greater care and compassion for people who may be impacted by changes in the industry.



“That our generation succeeded in causing our forests to recover from the over harvesting and also to have a valued sustainable plantation timber industry.”

“Timber towns and small businesses on the periphery of these forests which benefit from revenue from timber workers during the week and not just weekenders.”

There were a number of responses expressing a desire for no commercialisation of the forest and to maintain the protection and conservation of the forest for public use (15% of responses in this theme).

“How this area was protected for public use, and not sold for commercial gain.”

A smaller percentage of responses in this theme (10%) talked to the balance of industry whilst supporting the ecological values and biodiversity of the forest.

“Forests have a multitude of roles and can be healthy productive forests producing a range of timber products, honey and other commercial products whilst still supporting a healthy biodiverse ecosystem.”

Additional themes

Other themes included:

- Recreation and local use – that the forest should be open and managed for all to enjoy.
- Traditional Owner interest and support – recognition that future generations will remember and honour the Traditional Owners and respect the cultural significance of the area.
- Land and forest management – there is recognition of the role government played in deciding on the future management of the Strathbogie Ranges.
- Local community working together – everyday people joined with the land managers and Traditional Owners to work together to protect the forest and provide future enjoyment for all.
- Legislation and tenure – legislation that protects the forests in perpetuity with legislation that benefits all Victorians.
- Climate change – protection and care for Country is likely to be more urgent and time for action is now, so that forests in the future remain healthy in times of climate disruption.
- Regulation and compliance (including firewood) – availability of firewood to support local communities and reducing the overall damage to the forest.
- Pests and weeds (including hunting) – support for funding programs to reduce pests and weeds and managing hunting practice.

3.4 PEAK BODY CONVERSATIONS

OVERVIEW

Peak body conversations were conducted with representatives of 14 state and national peak bodies.

The peak bodies included, but were not limited to, Traditional Owners conservation and environment groups, recreation associations, commercial interest groups, and land managers. The organisations represented are outlined in the table below, with full details provided in Appendix A

	Australian Motorcycle Trail Riders Association
	Australian Trail Horse Riders Association
	Bushwalking Victoria
	Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners
	Four Wheel Drive Victoria
	Motorcycle Victoria
	Outdoors Victoria
	Parks Victoria
	The Wilderness Society
	Trust for Nature - Mirboo North
	Trust for Nature - Strathbogie Ranges
	Victorian Apiarist Association
	Victorian Hound Hunters Association
	Victorian National Parks Association

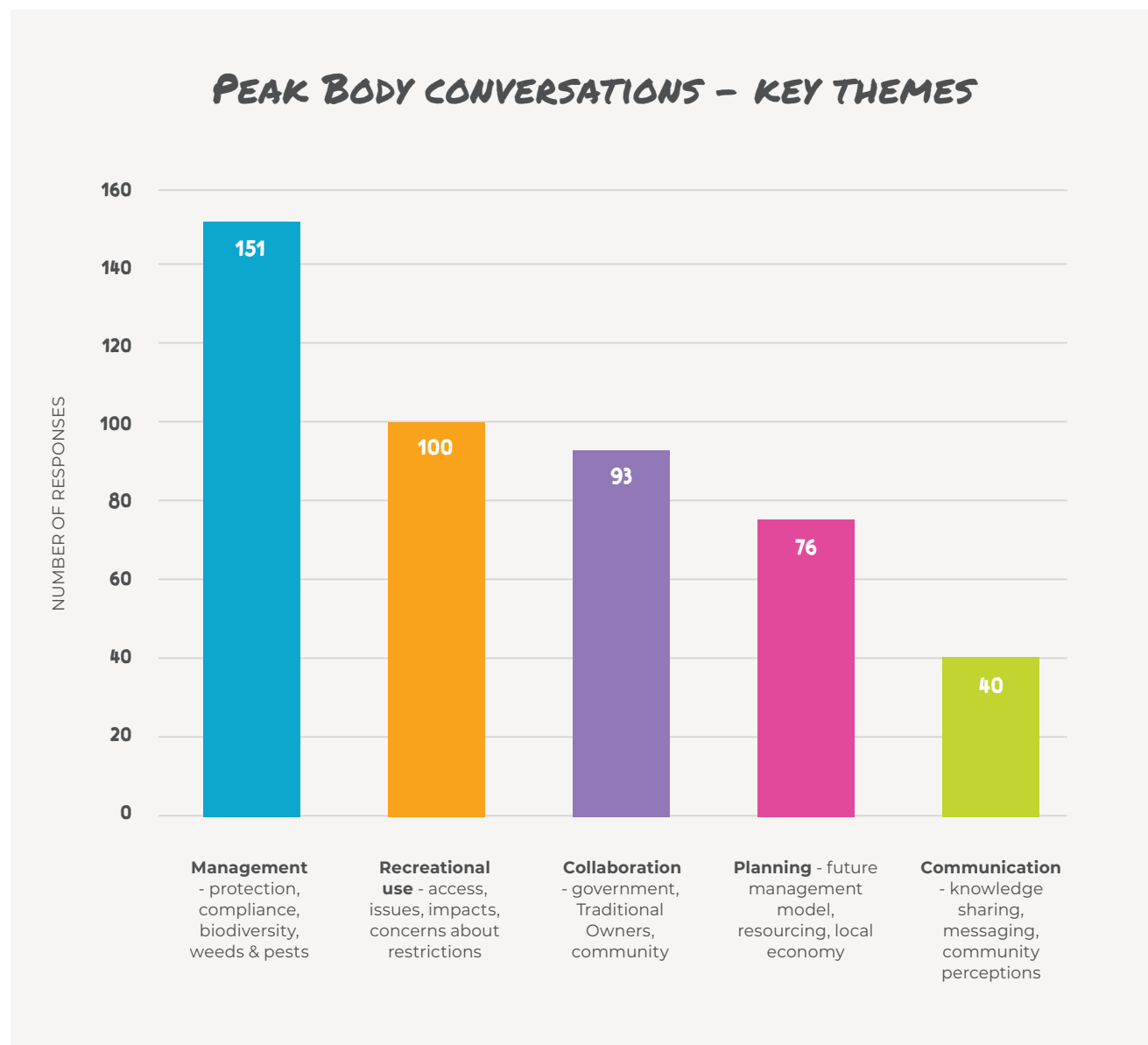
The meetings were conducted face-to-face and online, and each conversation took place over a 1-2 hour period.

The participants were invited to share their insights, knowledge and considerations with the Panel. These were recorded within the sessions and the data analysed for key themes.

A small number of individual peak bodies provided additional information or formal contributions through Engage Victoria.

KEY THEMES

The peak body conversations identified knowledge and interests across five key themes



THEME 1 – MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION OF THE FOREST



Conservation and forest management was the most prevalent theme among the peak bodies. Of the 460 comments from peak body representatives, 33% spoke about the threats to the environment and the need for greater protections, increased investment in habitat corridors, and managing the forest ecosystem as a whole.

“The IPA’s state-wide context have significant importance ... iconic species deserve long term protection to allow these species to continue”

“Habitat corridors are important and should be included in further VEAC assessments.”

“Interested in looking at areas as a whole and to consider the whole system protected areas always have an impact.”

Many peak bodies spoke about the need for tighter regulations and increasing compliance among forest users, however, there was a view that decisions made to regulate parts of the forest were not clearly understood or communicated, which leads to some forest users disregarding the rules.

“The threats of off-road recreational vehicles and illegal firewood collections. Off road vehicle use is out of control across this whole landscape - there are YouTube clips of people in the IPAs”

“Closing tracks, being locked out, there’s never any science to these decisions, may be poor management decision, people don’t understand why, so they ride either side of closed track.”

“We need to police the people that do not do the right thing.”

Peak bodies that met with the panel identified the significance of habitat and biodiversity, with regard to native species in the forest and surrounding regions.

“IPA’s state-wide context have significant importance, especially Strathbogie greater gliders, powerful owl, bushfire maintenance, suitable habitat, iconic species deserve long term protection to allow these species to continue.”

“These forests are important for bee keepers who live locally, across the state and maybe even interstate. The importance of the pollen and nectar sources make these forests incredibly productive.”

Participants spoke about the impacts of feral animals, weeds from surrounding areas and the potential for peak bodies to work with government departments and other peak bodies in management strategies.

“Bit of difference around pests and weeds, weeds from farms going into forest, pests coming out from forest, different thresholds for ecological management, levels will be different for different purposes.”

“Deer are in the area but there are not a lot of them. I didn’t read anything about deer in the VEAC report however I think it needs to be included and managed.”

“We have noticed that a huge problem is blackberries. Areas of the bush that are completely over grown with blackberries. This is an incredible environmental threat.”

“Our members feel they have a valuable role to play to manage the deer problem if the government was open to it.”

An opportunity was raised to consider higher impact recreational activities to be diverted to the timber plantations in the area. It was reported that some trail riders currently ride in the plantations however there are differing views on how the plantation managers would view this, or for it to be possible.

“We need to look at the areas around the sites, why can’t we use the plantation areas and put in single use tracks? Any damage we will do will be negligible to what the foresters will do.”

“Mixed message being sent to riders from plantations.”

Fire management was discussed by 5% of respondents, with interest in cultural burning to be considered as part of the management strategy.

“Good examples of collaborative approach to culture fire strategy and cultural landscape strategy, seen state work well together. One concern is timing in Public Land Act, make sure governance arrangement being put forward will still exist in the future.”

THEME 2 – RECREATIONAL USE

One hundred comments (22%) related to access for recreational use along with the impacts on forest due to some recreational activities. Many peak bodies spoke about issues or challenges faced by their organisation, in terms of access, community perceptions and infrastructure.



“We have lost access to where we used to be able to ride, due to expansion of Melbourne, areas where we used to ride are now populated.”

“Land managers do need to understand horse riders want a variety of experiences, we are currently being lumped with 4WD’s and trail bikes, perception of environmental damage, horse riding is conceived as high impact. Don’t understand why we are lumped in with 4WD’s.”

“Built infrastructure is an issue for us, and accommodation. More jobs in service provision”

Many peak bodies discussed their interest in having access to the forest for recreational use, and some spoke of the challenges in existing forest areas. Some groups recognised that recreational activities need to be planned and designed, and that the designated areas are not always conducive to some types of recreation.

“Recreational use is good but it needs to be planned, the location not always foreseeable for recreational use.”

Some participants shared the importance of creating connections with the forest, especially from an early age. Some spoke of the experience of accessing the forest across generations.

“Kids introduced to the natural world stay with it, fall in love with.”

“Lots of riders that have ridden the tracks with their fathers, they want to be able to do these rides with their kids.”

A small number of peak bodies discussed the impacts of certain recreational activities, with included damage to native habitats and existing tracks and trail, and rubbish left behind by some forest users.

“... we will work with any land manager, inform them, work through issues, it’s not about the activity you are doing, it’s the flow on effects.”

“We feel that the forestry and management of the forest does more damage than the 4WDs and the motor bikes.”

There is a concern from some peak bodies about being locked out of the forest. Some acknowledged the tension between the purposes of the IPA, and others spoke of inconsistencies with decision making.

“We congratulate the government for preserving and protecting the forest but we do not want to be shut out.”

THEME 3 – COLLABORATION



An interest in working more closely with government and other peak bodies, and in collaboration with Traditional Owners, was identified in 20% of comments. The peak bodies commented about the importance of collaboration as a driving principle, while recognising the limitations of their capacity due to governance models and resourcing.

"... ensure Traditional Owner's rights and interests are reflected in the management of public land."

"Will invest our time and resources where we can, we have limited resources ... we welcome government investment."

"Whatever tenures you get need management plans as a requirement, joint or collaborative, Traditional Owners have some status, categories don't always drive it."

"Supportive of Traditional Owner joint management."

THEME 4 – PLANNING AND RESOURCING



The importance of short and long term planning, including consideration for the forest management model, was evident in 17% of responses. Peak bodies identified the challenges within current governance structures, and the tensions among user groups and the community around how the forest should be managed and used. For some peak bodies, the purpose and definitions that inform the management structure are most important.

"Important to get the purposes right, things change over time, how do you keep them accountable? The terms 'uses' and 'management' are treated the same but are slightly different in definition."

"Some tension around infrastructure on park, with those who don't want any more visitation in our parks, with those who want more visitation rights, protect nature but offer more experiences, constant tension, angst against change, can be complex, stakeholders can be varied, changes be welcomed by some and not from others."

"... purpose of reserves is important, this should dictate the management. Really confusing currently, one in crown's land reserves act and one in forest act ... prefer bushland reserves, better definitions."

"Future planning management and governance be discussed in-depth with VEAC, how we can better explore in the future. Big opportunity here, needs to be seen within context most important voice is Traditional Owner voice of whose country it is. "

Funding and resourcing of the management body was also identified in this theme. Peak bodies welcome investment in infrastructure and the flow on effects for the local economy & tourism.

"There needs to be sufficient funding to support the management, it is so important."

"Mirboo North is straight forward; state park makes sense to us. Regional Parks have issues, lack of management plans, important to ensure protection, regional park needs proper management plan to balance values."

"It is an area that hasn't had a lot of funded work and engagement."

"There is a licensed tour operators review with DELWP, approx. 500 business across Victoria. We'd like it to feed into the sector, minimize red tape and costs so those businesses can grow, businesses that take kids to outdoors. Independent campers & schools need to record with land managers where they are going, so we can build in personnel and infrastructure around those sites."

THEME 5 – COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

Education and knowledge sharing was identified as a theme in 9% of the comments. This included the way peak bodies are represented in media, the need for greater communications around the value and purpose of the forest. Peak bodies also spoke about the perceptions of their organisation in the wider community, and a need for targeted messaging. Others are concerned that their messages are not being heard.



“Comes back to education, how do we get the message out – social media, all about punching out right message. Like to see more TV, some people don’t like authority, message should be around what the ramifications are, e.g. unattended fire then becomes bush fire. Need to punch out message, won’t be long before open fires in Victoria will be banned.”

“We are wacked on social media a lot, people telling us what they think.”

“We are frustrated around the messages we are trying to get across. We have been arguing the case around the importance and the link to bee keeping access to our native forests and food security.”



4. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Community conversation groups

Two local apiarists to the Strathbogie Ranges
Australian Motorcycles Trail Riders Association – local contact
Save our Strathbogie Forest
Euroa Environment Group
Strathbogie Tableland Landcare Group
Strathbogie Ranges Conservation Network
Strathbogie Sustainable Forest Group
Euroa Arboretum
The Swanpool Landcare Group
Chamber of Commerce
Euroa Caravan Park
Benalla Rural City Council
Strathbogie Shire Council
Benalla Country Fire Authority

Peak body organisations

Australian Motorcycle Trail Riders Association
Australian Trail Horse Riders Association
Bushwalking Victoria
Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners
Four Wheel Drive Victoria
Motorcycle Victoria
Outdoors Victoria
Parks Victoria
The Wilderness Society
Trust for Nature - Mirboo North
Trust for Nature - Strathbogie Ranges
Victorian Apiarist Association
Victorian Hound Hunters Association
Victorian National Parks Association

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE OF QUESTIONS – DROP INS AND ENGAGE VICTORIA

The drop ins were held:

9 May 2022 4:00 – 8:00pm Euroa Football Club	11 May 2022 8:30 – 11:00am Strathbogie Hall
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The questions that the community were asked at the drop in were:

FUTURE USES OF OUR FOREST

Share your ideas on how a healthy forest can be created and maintained for everyone



FUTURE USES OF OUR FOREST

What activities do you currently participate in?



FUTURE USES OF OUR FOREST

How do you think future generations will want to enjoy the forest?



FUTURE USES OF OUR FOREST

What do you imagine future generations will want to be reminded of when they visit the forest?



Questions asked on the Engage Victoria platform for the Strathbogie Ranges IPA engagement included the following:

Drawing on your knowledge and interests on the Strathbogie Ranges Immediate Protection Areas:

1. What activities do you currently participate in? Required

Tick all options that apply.

- ☐ Conservation of native flora & fauna
- ☐ Bee keeping
- ☐ Ancestral Storytelling and other related cultural/spiritual activities
- ☐ Citizen Science & Research
- ☐ Educational activities
- ☐ Tourism
- ☐ Trail bike riding
- ☐ Horse riding
- ☐ Camping
- ☐ Walking or Hiking
- ☐ Four wheel driving
- ☐ Quiet enjoyment
- ☐ Firewood collection for domestic use
- ☐ Hunting
- ☐ Other

2. Share your ideas on how a healthy forest can be created and maintained for everyone

In 500 words or less.

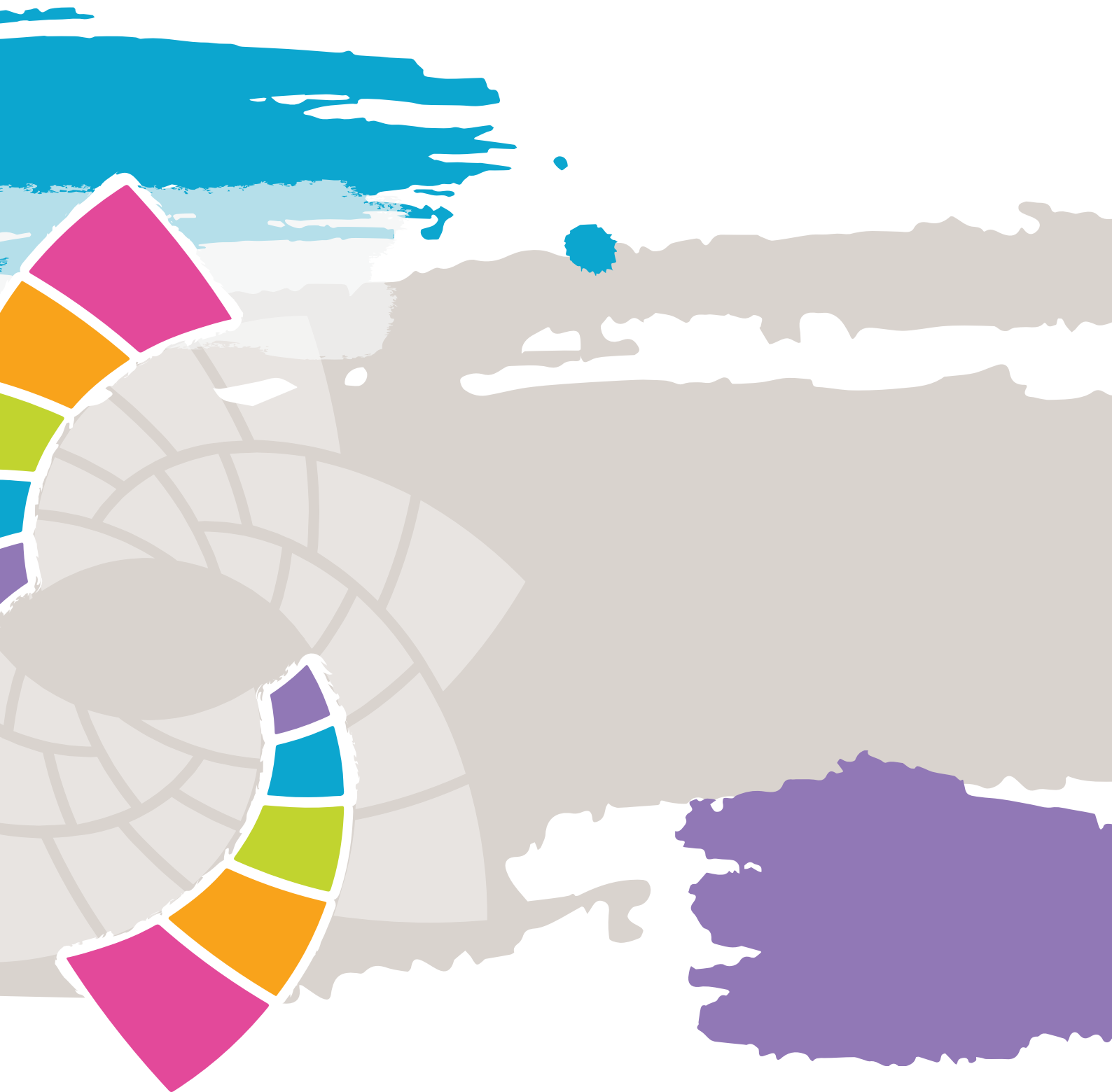
3. How do you think future generations will want to enjoy the forest? What will they do here? Required

Tick all options that apply.

- ☐ Conservation of native flora & fauna
- ☐ Bee keeping
- ☐ Ancestral Storytelling and other related cultural/spiritual activities
- ☐ Citizen Science & Research
- ☐ Educational activities
- ☐ Tourism
- ☐ Trail bike riding
- ☐ Horse riding
- ☐ Camping
- ☐ Walking or Hiking
- ☐ Four wheel driving
- ☐ Quiet enjoyment
- ☐ Firewood collection for domestic use
- ☐ Hunting
- ☐ Other

4. What do you imagine future generations will want to be reminded of when they visit the forest?

In 500 words or less



REPORT PREPARED BY:

mosaicLAB

www.mosaiclab.com.au